

# A Study On Stress Level And Coping Strategies Among Undergraduate Students

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**ABSTRACT:** Stress is simply the body's response to changes that create taxing demands. There is a difference between eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress. Coping mechanism plays a significant part to overcome or reduce the stress experienced by individuals. Students use different types of coping strategies to overcome their stress. The purpose of the study was to study the relationship between stress and coping strategies among undergraduate students. The result of this study indicated that majority of the undergraduate students have moderate level of stress. There was a significant inverse relationship between stress level and coping strategies among undergraduates. In conclusion, some levels of stress can be good, as the right kind of stress encourages them towards change and growth. However, when students are unable to cope with stress, they can become a burden. It is recommended that students should be encouraged to take part in extra-curricular activities such as sports and yoga to reduce stress.

**KEYWORDS:** stress, undergraduate, students, yoga, sports, moderate, anxiety, depression, workload

## I.INTRODUCTION

Stress can be defined as any type of change that causes physical, emotional or psychological strain. Stress is your body's response to anything that requires attention or action. Everyone experiences stress to some degree. The way you respond to stress, however, makes a big difference to your overall well-being. Stress affects both the brain and body. Little bit of stress is good for students to perform and protect themselves but too much stress can overwhelm them leading to fight, flight or freeze response. So learning how to cope with stress is important for our mental and physical wellbeing.[1,2] Stress can manifest as fear, worry, inability to relax, increased heart rate, difficulty in breathing, Disturbance in sleeping patterns, change in eating patterns, difficulty in concentrating worsening of pre-existing health conditions (physical and mental) and increased use of alcohol, tobacco and other drugs. It depends on how you react or respond to stress. Most students manage stress well and continue to function while a few may have difficulty in coping with stress. Such students should seek help from mental health treatment providers. Getting enough sleep least 8 hours, a night is good for both our body and mind. Sleep repairs, relaxes, rejuvenate our body and reverses the effect of stress.[3,4]

Good sleep habits (sleep hygiene) can help you improve your sleep:

- Be consistent. Go to bed at the same time each night and get up at the same time each morning, including on the weekends
- Make sure your bedroom is quiet, dark, relaxing, and at a comfortable temperature
- Remove electronic devices, such as TVs, computers, and smart phones, from the bedroom
- Avoid large meals, caffeine, and alcohol before bedtime
- Get some exercise. Being physically active during the day can help you fall asleep more easily at night.

Researches showed that the undergraduate students experienced moderate levels of stress. The medical students had the highest stress level among the students. Moreover, findings showed that the first-year students had low stress level.

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Most sources of stress were from students' academic. It was also found that there is a significant but weak negative relationship between undergraduate students' stress level and their academic achievement. In particular, female, rural, low-income, and academically underperforming students were more vulnerable to these mental health issues. However, a majority of students with moderate or severe mental health symptoms never used mental health services. Our results call for proactively reaching out to students, identifying students at risk of mental health issues, and providing accessible care. Although academic stress is a well-known risk factor for students' depression, little is known about the possible psychological mechanisms underlying this association. The relationship between perceived academic stress and depression, considered if mobile phone addiction and sleep quality is a mediator of this relationship, and tested if mobile phone addiction and sleep quality together play a serial mediating role in the influence of perceived academic stress on depression.[5,6]

Undergraduate education is a very important part in an individual's life and is also a turning point in their academic life. At this stage, the academic performance of a student plays a crucial role in deciding the next stage of their education, which in turn shapes their career. An excess of academic stress during this stage can result in adverse effects that are far-reaching and prolonged. In today's highly competitive world, students face various academic problems including exam stress, disinterest in attending classes and the inability to understand a subject. Academic stress involves mental distress regarding anticipated academic challenges or failure or even the fear of the possibility of academic failure. Academic stressors show themselves in many aspects in the students' environment: at school, home, in their peer relations and even in their neighbourhood.

Excessive levels of academic stress can result in an increased prevalence of psychological and physical problems like depression, anxiety, nervousness and stress related disorders, which in turn can affect their academic results. Anxiety as a disorder is seen in about 8% of adolescents and children worldwide. Anxiety and stress have a substantial negative effect on their social, emotional and academic success. Depression is becoming the most common mental health problem college students suffer these days. It is also a reflection of an individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic anxiety and academic pressure. The four components of academic stress usually identifiable in a student are academic frustration, academic conflicts, academic anxieties and academic pressures.[7,8]

According to most undergraduate students, their greatest academic stressors include tests, grades, homework, academic and achievement expectations and parental pressure. Academic related stresses include inadequate instructional methods, teacher-student relationships, heavy academic workload, poor physical classroom environments, inability to balance one's leisure time with class, and disorganization surrounding academic assignments and schedules. Additional sources consist of a struggle to meet academic standards, worries about time management and concerns over grades and scores. Students are thus, seen to be affected by the negative causes of academic stress. The mental health of students, especially in terms of academic stress and its impact, has become a serious issue among institutions and policymakers because of the increasing incidence of suicides among students across the globe. India has the world's highest suicide rates among the youth. Parental pressure for better academic performance is found to be mostly responsible for academic stress. Due to the constant pushing of the student by the parents in order to perform better in both academics and extra-curricular activities, some children develop deep-rooted nervous disorders during their childhood. Academic and exam stress is found to be positively correlated with parental pressure and psychiatric problems. It is important to remember that the mental constitution or coping capacities vary from one child to another. Therefore, children with poor coping capacities become more prone to anxiety, depression and fear of academic failure and this shows us that one should not compare one student with another. Looking at these high levels of academic stress in students which can also lead to psychological disorders, there is an urgent need to develop suitable interventions and solutions to reduce this level of stress and psychiatric morbidity.[9,10]

Here are some ways for students to manage and overcome academic stress:

1) Always have something to look forward to everyday and it doesn't always have to be something big. This helps to have a reason to anticipate the next day and thus cope with academic stress better.

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- 2) Studies have shown that a regular exercise routine often decreases symptoms of depression and stress. So exercise and sports, YES.
- 3) Create a proper schedule that will help you manage your academics and other activities in a more efficient manner.
- 4) Understand your academic capabilities, what is expected of you and try not to have unreasonable expectations.
- 5) Surround yourself with positive people, ALWAYS.[11,12]

## II.DISCUSSION

Health Science Preparatory Program (HSPP) is a special program that aims to enhance the educational preparedness of students for participation in a health sciences career. Students spend their first year in a combined extensive teaching program before they can be assigned to a particular health science specialty. HSPP mainly focuses on improving English language proficiency among the students. This is alongside introductory courses in Chemistry, Biology, Physics, Biostatistics, Computer science and communication skills. It is thought that students enrolled in a highly competitive environment such as HSPP with a long list of potential stressors including developmental, academic overload, language barrier and competition are more disposed to stress and stress-related complications. This study aims to measure the level of academic stress and to determine its risk factors in students enrolled in institutions of undergraduate level. Yoga has long been known to be a [great antidote to stress](#). Yoga combines many popular stress-reducing techniques, including exercise and learning to control the breath, clear the mind, and relax the body. As yoga becomes increasingly popular, more and more people are discovering the benefits this ancient practice brings to their stressful lives. Establishing a consistent yoga routine is the best way to experience the difference yoga can make. Hatha Yoga is the physical practice of [yoga postures](#). There are many different types of hatha yoga: some are slow and more focused on stretching, others are fast and more of a workout. If scholars are looking to relieve stress, no one yoga style is superior, so pick one that meets the level of physical fitness and personality. [13,14] Any exercise will help relieve stress by keeping the body healthy and releasing endorphins, natural hormones that make you feel better. Yoga also relieves stress through stretching. The stretching of yoga releases tension from problem areas, including the hips and shoulders. Relief of low back pain is another common benefit. Pranayama, or breath work, is an important part of any yoga practice and one that translates well to life off the mat. At the very least, yoga increases your awareness of the breath as a tool for relaxing the body. Our minds are constantly active, racing from one thought to another, spinning possible scenarios for the future, dwelling on incidents from the past. All this mind work is tiring and stressful.

Yoga offers several techniques for taming the monkey mind. One is breath work, as outlined above. Each breath is tied inextricably to the present moment; you are not breathing in the past or the future, but only right now. Focusing on each inhale and exhale to the exclusion of other thoughts is one way to clear the mind, It is also a basic meditation technique. In addition, the performance of yoga poses, or asanas, also acts as a form of meditation. The poses are so physical and have to be done with such concentration, that all other thoughts and worries are put to the side, giving your brain a much-needed break.

Each yoga sessions ends with five to ten minutes spent relaxing in corpse pose - savasana. While this enforced relaxation can be difficult at first, eventually it serves the purpose of a total release for both body and mind. Savasana transitions you back into the world feeling refreshed and equipped with the tools to combat stress in your daily life. Yoga Nidra is a practice that offers an opportunity for a longer, deeper period of relaxation and an introduction to meditation, which can also be a great stress reducer.[15,16]

## III.RESULTS

Sports boost your overall health and offer other benefits. You might enjoy playing sports because you can spend time with your friends. Or maybe you like sports because they keep you fit. Sports benefit your [mental health](#) too. Playing them makes you [happier](#) or less stressed.

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Sports calm your mind, strengthen your muscles, and improve your overall well-being. It's easy to start playing sports and receiving these benefits undergraduate students' life. Sports help to manage stress. Exercise causes your body to release [endorphins](#), the chemicals in your brain that relieve pain and stress. It also reduces the levels of stress hormones, [cortisol](#) and [adrenaline](#). Playing a sport such as golf or skiing forces to put aside your worries and concentrate on the task at hand. This helps you clear mind and calm down. It also helps the scholar to sleep better. Sports help treat depression. Studies show that exercise improves symptoms of depression and reduces the risk of relapse.

Student stress can be caused by a variety of factors, including:

- struggling with your mental health
- loneliness, homesickness or relationship difficulties
- finding it hard to save money or deal with debt
- not knowing how to balance work and study
- worrying about revising for exams
- struggling with writing essays or dissertations
- feeling unsure about what to do after graduation
- harmful use of, or withdrawal from, alcohol or drugs.[17,18]

There are a number of common reactions to stressful circumstances including:

- Behavioural - these could involve avoiding or escaping from the situation and turning to alcohol or drugs, a change in appetite or an inability to concentrate.
- Physical - you may experience an increased heart rate, sweating, shaking, headaches, butterflies and over-breathing.
- Psychological - stress can lead to fear, panic and the feeling that something bad is going to happen.

'Regular exercise can help relieve stress in many ways. 'There is breathing centred exercise like yoga and pilates, which is good for grounding and breathing management. Aerobic exercise can equally manage stress hormones, release tension and increase endorphin levels creating a 'feel good' vibe. Team sports and activities can add a social dimension that can additionally support someone with stress management, as we know that social engagement benefits our mental health and wellbeing.' A relaxation technique originating in Buddhism, mindfulness is a popular coping mechanism for those tackling stress or anxiety. Used by clinicians to improve patients' physical and mental health, it can significantly lower stress levels. It is most often practised through deep breathing or guided meditation. 'Mindfulness can be useful at allowing us time to step away from automatic thoughts and reactions, to remove intensity from our emotions. It is more effective if practiced regularly. There is evidence to show that after eight weeks of regular practice, mindfulness can improve the bodies response to stress and changes the shape of the brain.'

Isolation can have an extremely negative impact on happiness. Accepting that scholar needs help and talking to someone is often the first step to feeling better.[19,20]

'Stress thrives in the dark, it convinces us we can't cope, so reach out to people who can help. Talking about what's stressing you out can be useful. Try to be clear on whether you're looking for advice or just need someone to listen. Speak to friends and family - they know best and care about most. What's more, studies suggest that socialising with a friend just once a week can reduce your stress levels and improve your mood as much as therapy or counselling. Talk to other students on your course and you will probably find that you're not alone. This can help put things in perspective. Ask them what techniques they use to manage stress.' Sometimes sharing with someone can create perspective as well as lead to additional support options, which can relieve sense of overwhelm and stress experience.

Alternatively, make an appointment with your student wellbeing service. The majority of institutions have these and they should be your first port of call if you're worried, stressed or upset about anything. They'll provide a listening ear and can signpost you to specialist services who can offer specific support if needed. While wellbeing services don't

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provide counselling support, most institutions offer free counselling and support groups. Sessions tackle wide-ranging themes, from surviving freshers' week to coping with post exam stress.[21]

## IV.CONCLUSIONS

Students often get stressed when they feel that they're running out of time to complete a task - this could be study or work related or even stem from feeling overwhelmed with social activities. However, simple time management techniques can help to feel more relaxed and focused. Try creating a written schedule, breaking tasks down into manageable chunks, planning accordingly and allocating time everyday to relax or socialise. Divide the work into urgent and non-urgent tasks, and important and non-important tasks. Take a look on institutions website. Most institutes produce useful content pages, skills guides and toolkits to help you get to grips with soft skills such as time management and organisation. This might sound like an obvious solution but it's often overlooked. The mental health and wellbeing relies on getting enough sleep, as no one functions at 100% when they're tired.[20]

Trying to wake up and go to sleep at the same time each day. Seven to eight hours of sleep is recommended. This might not be realistic every night of the week but aim towards this goal more often than not. Sleep is important for recuperating the bodies systems and allowing us to process memories. If the scholar doesn't get enough sleep, this can make us more irritable, impact on our concentration, coordination and memory and make us more vulnerable to mental health problems or exacerbate existing ones.

Trying to do everything to relax yourself before going to bed. Taking a bath or have a warm shower to wind down, watching favourite TV show, listen to a podcast or sitting quietly and read. Avoid screen time as much as possible and switch off laptops, phones and tablets at least an hour before going to sleep. If the student studies in the same room where he/she sleeps then it is good to put all study materials away. 'Self-care is really important for example, exercise, eating regularly and well, fluids, sleep, hygiene, social engagements and 'downtime' hobbies.'[21]

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