MEASURING STRESS LEVEL AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS OF PUBLIC UNIVERSITY IN LAHORE

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Abstract:
Transition from college to university, from annual system to semester system causes stress among students by taking this perspective the purpose of the current study was to assess the level of stress among undergraduate university students studying at public sector universities of Lahore. Study used descriptive design and data was collected through survey questionnaire. With the help of convenience sampling technique 300 public sector university undergraduates of 1st, 5th and 7th semester students were participated in the study from which 124 were male and 176 female students. Results indicated a moderate stress level among university undergraduates and a significant difference was noted in stress level of all the three semesters with respect to social and academic Factor. Further studies at secondary school level to determine the stress level were recommended.

Keywords: Stress level, Undergraduate students, Physical, Social, and Academic factors aspects

1. Introduction

Everyone's life has become more stressful as the world has evolved and worldwide demands have increased. Every person on the planet is stressed in some way, such as students due to their workload and assignments, moms due to the future of their children, employees, leaders, and even a single person encounters all forms of discomfort, which is why this age is known as the age of stress (Hussien & Hussien, 2006). Different authors describe stress in different ways. In his book, Richard Lazarus, McNamara (2000) mentioned three different theories of stress (1984) define stress A certain interaction between a human being and his environment that a person may find beneficial to his lifestyle or may believe is detrimental to his well-being. The transition from college to higher education is not only difficult, but also dangerous to students' well-being. It could put your health, academics, and social life at risk. The new course load, new assessment methodologies, unsatisfactory grades, family income social adjustment challenges with staff, students of opposite sex and institutional culture, as well as educational needs that appear to be very different from college level, all contribute to this difficulty. The high level of stress among students need a successful and ongoing coping mechanism (Scott, 2009). Stressors that create stress, according to Yikealo, Tareke, and Karvinen (2018), can be the result of environmental or internal factors that make learning harder for pupils. Students at universities are expected to manage their finances, careers, financial concerns, future opportunities, and social obligations. In a variety of areas and courses, students are required to complete assignments, projects, quizzes, presentations, and continuing evaluation in the form of midterm exams and portfolios. All of this could lead to a wide range of academic outcomes, exacerbating the problem. As a result, students experience mental health issues such as depression, which can lead to serious negative habits such as smoking and drinking. As a result, increased stress among students leads to serious mental and physical health problems, as well as potential failure (Yikealo, Tareke& Karvinen, 2018). All previous investigations on the subject indicated that the consequences or outcomes were inconsistent and varied. That's why this issue needs more attention to overcome it in future (Agolla, 2009).

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1.2   Objectives of the Study
The objectives of the study were:

1. To explore the stress level among university students in Lahore.
2. To identify the effects of factors (Physical, social, and academic) on university student's stress.
3. To identify the difference between demographic variables among university students.

1.3   Research Questions
The study was based on following research questions:

1. What is the level of stress among public sector university students in Lahore?
2. What are the effects of physical, social, and academic factors on student's stress level?
3. What is the difference between male and female university student's regarding stress level?
4. What is the difference between sciences and social sciences department university students regarding stress level?
5. What is the difference between CGPA regarding stress level of university students?
6. What is the difference between 1st, 5th, and 7th semester undergraduate university students regarding stress level?

Literature Review

According to Altmaier (1983, p. 3), the problem of stress is obtaining more attention in newspapers, literature studies, and other aspects of life. Many studies have investigated a variety of reasons why university students are stressed. Family responsibilities, institutional shifts, friendship relationships, financial concerns, missing home, and a variety of other issues that students face are among the variables that affect them and generate stress. When we look at the research, we can see that students and stress are substantially correlated, according to Ross, Neibling, and Heckert (1999). According to Ross et al. (1999), when studying stress, we must consider the significant or positive variables as well as the detrimental or negative factors for college students Because all pupils are different, so are the things that induce stress in each individual. The higher education system has its own set of instructional methods, study demands, outcomes, and new curriculum relationships with faculty and peers, all of which place a strain on students (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012). Stress is a typical concern among university students since they must prepare for the future and build a career that will prepare them for practical life. Most of the stress was caused by a mismatch between what should be learned and how it should be learned. According to Auerbach & Gramling (1998), as referenced by Jain & Singhai (2017), if pupils are unable to cope with their stress, they could develop major health problems or disabilities that will last for the rest of their life, posing a threat to their existence.   Many research findings (Dunbar, 1938; Misiak & Sexton, 1966; Plaut & Friedman, 1981; Zilboorg & Henry, 1941) concluded that both the psychological and physiological aspects of stress have been known to cause disturbance among students since ancient times, and that it can cause mental illness, bad eating habits, stomach issues, fear, skin diseases, muscle pain, and a variety of other health problems. When a difficult scenario emerges, tension is almost always present. Students endure a great deal of stress when they enter a completely new and professional atmosphere. Academic stress, according to Mazumdar, Gogoi, Buragohain, and Haloi (2012), is a part of a student's life and necessitates a high level of skill to deal with it. Uncertain assignments, new evaluation rules and regulations, projects, large study schedules, financial concerns, student competition, and new and unreasonable demands from instructors and parents all contribute to an ongoing cycle of stress. Although it is a natural and evident reaction to the study-related challenges that students confront, academic stress can have both beneficial and harmful implications. Stress that produces extreme mental and physical anxiety, on the other hand, can lead to melancholy, anxiety, suicide, and social relationship problems (Combs, Cantu, Berman-Folks, Rocheleau, Neiman, 2012). Edwards, Hershberger, Russell, and Markert (2001) conducted an experimental study to investigate the effects of positive and negative social support on the physical health of undergraduate university students. They employed the survey approach to collect data from 206 participants who were Asian, Hispanic, White, African, and American students of Ohio State University, all of them were 19 years old and volunteered to participate in the study. The researchers utilized six different scales to assess the link between stress and various characteristics. The course of study on which they were evaluated was given to the targeted demographic, and data was collected in groups of 10 to 15 students. Data analysis approaches such as correlation and multiple regressions were used.

Britz &Pappas (2010) found that stress may be a major barrier to living a healthy life, as they investigated sources of stress and their many pathways in university students, as well as relationships between stress and bad behaviors. Freshmen at university experience high levels of stress during their academic year, but these studies were conducted in the middle of the year, when workload was typical. However, demographics, academic workload, sleep patterns, co-curricular activities, social life, and money were all examined using a questionnaire completed by 124 freshmen of the same age. Academic pressure and time management were important sources of stress among freshmen university students, according to the report. What causes a high amount of stress? The cause of elevated stress levels among students is linked to several variables, including poor sleep and health practices. Furthermore, they recommend that institutions give students with a basic understanding of stress and that the causes that students identified be addressed. While students' current and future health must begin future studies to provide better understanding to cope with stress (Britz& Pappas, 2010).

In their study "Assessing stress among university students in Jordan," Thawabieh&Qaisy (2012) conducted a quantitative survey on 471 students to assess the level of stress among university students. They discovered that the origin of a student's inner environment was variables or stresses that induce stress among students. According to Thawabieh&Qaisy (2012) (Hussien and Hussien, 2006), there are three types of trends: root of stress, inner condition of person, reaction to external environment, and unfixed approach, which is a combination of the two. The findings of this study suggest that students experienced moderate levels of stress during their studies, with girls experiencing more stress than male students. Furthermore, community factors appeared to have a greater impact on producing stress among students. Students from the following schools those in science and management are more stressed than students in other disciplines. The study's flaw was that it did not recommend coping skills for students to reduce stress, or what measures or preparations educators might undertake to create an educational environment that allows students to relax and unwind (Thawabieh&Qaisy, 2012).

Several investigations on stress management in university students have been undertaken, including one by Semel, in which blood samples from 69 students were obtained and a clear link between stress and inflammation was discovered, which leads to major disorders (Wheeler). Due to a lack of research on younger generations, there has been a failure to tackle difficulties faced by younger generations as contrasted to older generations. Most past research has focused on stress concerns faced by older generations (Britz, 2007).

Numerous research studies were conducted on stress issues more work had been done in outside but less in done inside specially in Lahore. All studies were either mixed method or qualitative and quantitative too, which usually focused on correlation between different factors of stress causes of stress and their suggestions to coping with stress. By considering the past research gaps the researcher conducted the current study by using odd number (1st, 5th and 7th) of semesters particularly undergraduate public sector university students in order to assess whether the transition from semester to semester changes the stress level of students. This study was carried out during pandemic situation the data was collected while students were getting instructions via online this also may add to the research field.

2.   Methodology

A descriptive research study by using survey design was conducted. The targeted population was undergraduate students of public sector universities, students of 1st, 5th and 7th semester was taken as sample. There were 176 female and 124 male students who participated in the study from both social sciences and sciences departments. The demographic data contained in the surveys questionnaire of this study formed the independent variables for this study. Students received survey questionnaire which was developed on Google forms via E-mail and other social media platforms due to the COVID-19 pandemic situation all over the world the institution were closed, and students were getting instructions via online mode. A survey questionnaire was adopted from the research study of (Thawabieh& Qaisy, 2012). Thus, there were 300 respondents (*N*=300) for this quantitative study. The reliability of the questionnaire was measured thorough pilot testing the value of Chronbach Alpha Reliability test was applied using SPSS version 23 to check the reliability of scale and three factors associated with stress level.

Reliability of scale

	Cronbach's alpha	**Items**
Physical factor	0.82	11
Social factor	0.83	9
Academic factor	0.83	15
Scale	**0.83**	**35**

The instruments reliability was α= 0.83 which is a very good reliability value and the factors reliability ranged from (0.82-0.83).

The instrument has three domains, with accompanying sub-questions each. Social, Physical, and academic Factor were included in three domains to measure which factor affects the level of stress among students. The data collected was then analyzed using Statistical Packages for the Social Sciences (*SPSS*) Version 23. Mean and SD was measured through descriptive statistics. To test the significant differences between genders and departments in this study, *t*-test was used. The *t*-test, which is a type of inferential statistic, was chosen to provide an analysis that goes beyond just describing the numbers provided by data from a sample but seeks to draw conclusions about the significant difference of these numbers among populations. While ANNOVA test was used to find out the difference between CGPA and Semesters. The data collected for this study went through several processes based on Creswell's (2009) quantitative data analysis.

3.   Results

The results of this study are discussed based on the research questions stipulated.

4.1 What is the level of stress among public sector university students in Lahore?

Based on the overall available data, the level of stress that undergraduate public university students had was "*medium*". In Table 1, the mean score related to stress level (M=2.91, SD=0.53) showed the medium level of stress out of 5. The stress related to social factors was also medium with a mean score of (M=3.27, SD=0.84). The mean score related to academic Factor also showed the medium level of stress associated with academic Factor (M=2.95, SD=0.70).Similarly the stress related to physical factors was medium as the mean value(M=2.57, SD=9.30).

Table 1
Level of stress among undergraduate students

Stress Sources	Mean	St. Deviation
Physical Factors	2.57	9.30
Social Factors	3.27	0.84
Academic Factors	2.95	0.70
Stress level	2.91	0.53

4.2 What are the effects of physical, social, and academic factors on student's stress level?

To answer this research question, the mean value of all factors is indicated by this table, that are most disturbing for students. The mean value of Physical factors of stress was (M=2.57, SD=0.84). which show that students face moderate level of stress related to physical factors. The mean value of social factors of stress was (M=3.27, SD=0.43) which show a moderate level of social stress. The mean value of academic factor of stress was (M=2.95, SD=0.70) which was also moderate. Thus, the data shows that all the factors of stress were equally disturbing for students but at moderate level. Thus, results manifest that the factors of stress were not highly disturbing for students.

Table 2
Factors associated with stress

	N	Mean	Standard deviation
Physical factor	300	2.57	0.84
Social factor	300	3.27	0.43
Academic Factor	300	2.95	0.70

4.3 What is the difference between male and female university student's regarding stress level?

To answer this research question, an independent sample *t*-test was used. An alpha level (*p*) of .05 was set for this analysis. Based on Table 3 an independent t-test and the Levene's Test output showed that the degrees of freedom (*df*) is at (298) while the group means are not statistically significantly different because of the value in the "Sig. (2-tailed)" row is greater than 0.05. The *t*-value is (.018), while the *p* =.570 (*p* > 0.05) which indicated no statistically significant difference between male and female Undergraduate students studying in public universities of Lahore.

Table 3 Independent Samples t-test for significant differences between genders

Difference between male and female students in facing stress

	Gender	N	Mean	SD	Dif	t	Sig
Stress level	Male	125	2.91	0.56	298	.018	.570
	Female	175	2.91	0.51			

Thus Table 3 shows that there was found no significant difference between stress level of male and female students. The difference in mean values was only minor and results can't be applicable to the overall population.

4.4 What is the difference between sciences and social sciences department university students regarding stress level?

To answer this research question, an independent sample *t*-test was used. An alpha level (*p*) of .05 was set for this analysis. Based on Table 4 an independent t-test and the Levene's Test output showed that the degrees of freedom (*df*) is at (298) while the group means are not statistically significantly different because of the value in the "Sig. (2-tailed)" row is greater than 0.05. The *t*-value is (1.49), while the *p* =.22 (*p* > 0.05) which indicated no statistically significant difference between sciences and social sciences Undergraduate students studying at public universities of Lahore.

Table 4 Independent Samples t-test for significant differences between departments

Significant difference between Sciences and Social Sciences students in their stress level

	Department	N	Mean	SD	Dif	t	Sig
Stress level	Sciences	151	2.95	.57	298	1.49	.22
	Social Sciences	149	2.87	.49			

Table shows that the results t (298) =1.49 p >.05. The data table shows that there was no statistically significant difference between stress level of sciences and social sciences undergraduate students. The difference found in the mean values was only chance fluctuation and not be generalized to the population.

4.5 What is the difference between CGPA regarding stress level of university students?

Table 5 One-way ANNOVA

Significant difference of stress level in terms of CGPA among undergraduate students

	Sum of squares	Dif	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	.40	3	.133		
Within groups	85.68	296	.289	.460	.710
Total	86.08	299			

The table above demonstrates a statistically non-significant difference in stress levels based on CGPA among undergraduate students, f (296) =.460, p=0.71. The discrepancy in the pupils' mean values is only a random fluctuation in a small sample.

4.6 What is the difference between 1st,5th, and 7th semester undergraduate university students regarding stress level?

Table 6

Significant difference in stress level among 1st, 5th, and 7thsemester undergraduate students

One-way ANNOVA

	Sum of squares	Dif	Mean square	F	Sig.
Between groups	4.63	2	2.31		
Within groups	81.4	297	.274	8.44	.000
Total	86.085	299			

According to the above data, there was a statistically significant difference in stress levels for most first, fifth, and seventh semester undergraduate students, f (297) = 8.44, p=0.000. To determine the difference between semesters, a post-hoc comparison using the SD test was performed.

Post hoc Test (LSD)

(I) Semester	(J) Semester	Mean Difference (I-J)	Std. Error	Sig
1st	5th	.18067*	.07268	.013
	7th	.30832*	.07566	.000
5th	1st	-18067*	.07268	.031
	7th	.12765	.07430	.087
7th	1st	-.30832*	.07566	.000
	5th	-.12765	.07430	.087

The table above compares the stress levels of undergraduate students over the course of their semesters. A post hoc test was used, and the results revealed that there was a substantial difference between the students' semesters. There is a large difference between first semester, fifth semester, and seventh semester pupils (.000). When compared to students in the 5th and 7th semesters, however, the difference is not substantial. As a result of the findings, a considerable disparity between students from three semesters was discovered.

4. Discussion

This study points towards the stress level that university students had while studying at undergraduate level. Finding of the study shows that students had a moderate level of stress and all the factors including physical, social, and academic were equally disturbing for students at a moderate level. The study's findings on the first research question, "What is the level of stress among university students," discovered a moderate level of stress among university undergraduate students, which was similar to the findings of (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012; Yikealo, Tareke& Karvinen, 2018), which also discovered a moderate level of stress among university undergraduate students. While (Britz & Pappas, 2010; Khan & Chaudhary, 2014) did stress research, they found

a significant degree of stress among university students, which contradicts the current study's conclusions. This could be owing to the COVID-19 scenario in the country, which has resulted in an online system of instructions. Thus, the moderate stress show may be students were a little bit relaxed while studying from home. This study supports the need to have a continued investigation and discussion on why the undergraduate students are facing stress in their academics and what are the possible causes which lead them to stress. What are the elements that are linked to stress among university students, according to the findings of the second study question? All stress elements (physical, social, and academic) were shown to be similarly distressing for students, but at a moderate degree. The findings revealed that stress factors were not particularly bothersome to students. These findings contradicted those of (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012), who reported that social and academic factors had a significant impact on students' stress levels. This could be since undergraduate students were able to manage with all types of stress because they possessed strong social, academic, and physical abilities. This study shows that male and female students have no significant difference in facing stress which means both are stressed in their academics as well as in social and physical aspects this is a warning for the public institutions that may lead to the higher level of stress in future if the students are not provided with required counseling and meditation techniques to cope with their stress. These findings contradict those of (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012; Panda, Mandal & Barman, 2015), who found that female students were more stressed than male students. However, the findings of (Majumdar & Ray, 2010; Khan, Altaf & Kausar, 2013) were found to be like the findings of the current study, which indicated no gender differences in stress. This may indicate that the male and female students in the current study were more aware of stress-reduction measures. However, there were statistically no significant differences in level of stress among sciences and social sciences students which shows they are equally stressed these findings contradicted those of (Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012), who reported that sciences students were more stressed out than other university students. There was no significant difference in stress levels among undergraduate students in terms of their CGPA's, but there was a significant difference in stress levels related to academic factors was revealed by this study ; these findings were in contrast to those of (Yikealo, Yemane, & Karvinen,2018), who found a slight difference in stress levels in terms of CGPA related to social factors of stress. This shows students needs a better way to teaching and learning process that may help them to cope with academic stress.

5.   Conclusion and Recommendations

The transition from college to postsecondary education is not only difficult, but also dangerous to students' well-being. It could put your health, academics, and social life at risk. The new course load, new assessment methodologies, unsatisfactory grades, family income social adjustment challenges with staff, students of opposite sex and institutional culture, as well as educational needs that appear to be very different from college level, all contribute to this difficulty.

Similarly, there are no well-documented research on stress measurement at the undergraduate level in Pakistan. There was a lack in doing such studies in Lahore city, to be more explicit. Most students from other cities come to Pakistan and enroll in public sector universities, particularly in the Lahore division. By taking into account this gap, the current study takes a first step toward addressing the problem of stress and aims to investigate the level of stress among undergraduate students at public sector institutions in Lahore in relation to physical, social, and intellectual aspects. Furthermore, this study is intended to contribute theoretically to scientific knowledge in the field of mental health studies as well as practically to university stakeholders in order to improve their stress coping and counselling services in order to make their campuses stress-free and conducive to learning. This will undoubtedly boost the academic environment and students' well-being.

The findings of the study revealed that the university students had moderate level of stress and all the factors were equally disturbing and causes stress among students. while there was significant difference in stress level of 1st,5th, and 7th semester students. Also, there was significant difference in stress level related to social and academic factors between these semesters which showed students need more social assistance to cope this social stress and newer and innovative methods of teaching to overcome academic stress.

The researchers recommended that university/college management teams take constructive actions to lower students' stress to ensure that they have good mental health and can perform well in their studies, based on their findings. They can do so by establishing a positive learning environment that includes appropriate teaching and learning approaches. They must also give proper counselling to reduce psychological and social stress. The researchers also suggest that university/college management teams focus a high priority on ensuring that courses are well-designed. They should also make sure that student support services are in place, that students are made aware of the possibility for stress during the transition from high school to university/college life, and that proper training and seminars are held to help students cope with stress.

All these strategies will aid in reducing the stress that students experience because of their academic pursuits. Furthermore, it is acknowledged that this study has limitations, particularly in terms of sample size. As a result, it is suggested that a comparable study be conducted with a bigger sample of respondents to establish the validity of the findings and to generalize them to the entire community. In addition, future research encompassing a broader array of information in terms of sociodemographic, psychological, and institutional characteristics is required to corroborate the current findings and to enlighten corrective approaches.

6.   References

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