

*Review Article***Understanding the Academic Stress: Factors, Impact and Strategies: A Review**Kristy Anjala<sup>1,\*</sup><sup>1</sup> Lecturer, Department of Business Management, Rajarata University of Sri Lanka, Sri Lanka.\*Corresponding Author Email Address: [anjalaak@mgt.rjt.ac.lk](mailto:anjalaak@mgt.rjt.ac.lk)DOI: <https://doi.org/10.69996/ijari.2024003>**Article Info**

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**ABSTRACT**

Academic stress is a condition of mental or emotional strain brought by the expectations and pressures coming through the demands of the educational setting. Many descriptive studies have been conducted to determine the degree of academic stress that students encounter, and have found that undergraduates experience moderate to severe levels of stress due to the expectations and pressures coming through the demands of the educational setting. Accordingly, this narrative review is intended to analyze the literature with the objective of identifying the factors affecting academic stress, the impact of stress on academic performance, academic satisfaction, psychological well-being, and physical health. Lastly, this review aims to discover different stress-coping strategies highlighted in the existing literature. The accomplishment of these objectives will raise awareness of the importance of academic stress among educators, legislators, and mental health professionals, consequently improving university students' overall well-being.

**1. Introduction**

Students may feel under pressure or strain due to a variety of causes that they encounter within their environment [1-5]. This state of pressure or strain on the mind may be called "academic stress." Different academics have provided different theories for why students experience academic stress in a learning setting. Academic stress is the condition of mental or emotional strain brought on by the expectations and pressures coming through the demands of the educational setting. Accordingly, unrealistically high expectations that are greater than what they can manage might lead to academic stress for the students. Many descriptive studies have been conducted to determine the degree of academic stress that students encounter. Descriptive statistics on nursing students' levels of academic stress were studied by Joy et al. (2016) who found that the majority of students (82.5%) reported having a moderate degree of academic stress, while 7.5% reported having severe academic stress. 92% of undergraduate pharmacy students report experiencing academic stress, according to Yousif et al. (2022). Dewi et al. (2022) also found that 28% of students had severe academic stress and 2% of students had extremely high academic stress. Similarly, descriptive data on stress levels among university students were also found by Oketch-Oboth and Okunya (2018), with 35.6% reporting low stress levels and 64.4% reporting moderate to high levels. Examining academic stress in detail reveals that it stems from a variety of situations in students' lives. This stress is associated with a student's academic performance, workload, time management challenges, peer pressure, financial constraints, and sense of social pressure [6-10].

Scholars investigate these elements because they are important and they help us comprehend academic stress. Examining the elements that contribute to academic stress is necessary for a thorough knowledge of academic stress. The literature reveals both internal and external elements that

shape the experiences of students, influencing their stress levels [11-13]. Factors that contribute to undergraduate stress include, not limited to, academic expectations and performance, workload, competition, financial concerns, and social pressures have given prominent place within the literature. Apart from the variables influencing academic stress, the research also examined how academic stress affected several facets of the student's learning environment [14-16]. The influence of academic stress, in particular, on academic performance, academic satisfaction, psychological well-being, and physical health, has therefore been the subject of research in the literature. Finding methods to assist students in overcoming various obstacles in their education is more important since, as the research makes clear, academic stress has a variety of negative impacts on students' lives. This makes it crucial to learn about the different coping methods and stress management techniques used by undergraduate students. Scholarly literature has proposed a variety of strategies, ranging from integrated activities that relieve stress to specialized coping mechanisms designed to address academic stress. The objectives of this review are therefore threefold, given the topic's current relevance;

- 1) What factors contribute to academic stress?
- 2) How does academic stress influence academic performance, academic satisfaction, psychological well-being, and physical health?
- 3) What stress-coping strategies are identified in the existing literature?

The accomplishment of these objectives will not only identify the causes of academic stress but will also foster remedies that improve students' general wellbeing and improve the learning environment in universities.

**2. Methods**

Using sources such as ScienceDirect and Google Scholar, a thorough investigation of academic stress is carried out in this narrative review, based on peer-reviewed publications



published between 2015 and 2023. Utilizing an extensive list of keywords, the search concentrated on English-language research on academic stress in college students, including academic achievement, academic satisfaction, psychological health, and physical health. Many possible papers were found by the first search, and a snowball approach was used to look for references in publications that were found, adding further relevant research. To make sure they were in line with the goals of the study, the gathered papers went through a thorough evaluation procedure. Data extraction involved defining the major causes of academic stress, predicting outcomes for academic achievement, academic satisfaction, psychological well-being, physical health, and identifying the stress-coping strategies exercised by the students. Accordingly, thematic analysis was used to classify academic stressors, understand the impact on various outcomes, and identify coping strategies.

**3. Factors Influencing Academic Stress**

A proper understanding of academic stress requires an examination of the factors that affect this process. The literature shows how inner and outer factors shape student experiences, which affect disruption levels. Factors such as academic performance pressure, workload, deadlines, competition, financial problems, social pressures, etc. will put undergraduate students in a difficult situation that could be detrimental to their well-being and academic performance. A few particular factors found in the literature are presented in Table 1.

**Table 1.** Factors Affecting Academic Stress

Author (Year)	Factors
Aisyah, D., Hasanuddin, H., and Munir, A. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-esteem</li> <li>• Intelligence</li> <li>• Problem-solving</li> <li>• Self-efficacy</li> <li>• Desire to achieve achievements</li> <li>• External factors</li> </ul>
Chatterjee, A., Roy, S., and Mandal, A. (2023)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-motivation</li> <li>• Mind stability</li> <li>• Self-confidence</li> <li>• Environment</li> <li>• Financial pressure</li> <li>• Family support</li> <li>• Combat capability</li> </ul>
Lubis, H., Oktafia, M., and Putri, A. P. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Self-adjustment</li> <li>• Learning saturation</li> <li>• Grit</li> </ul>
Harahap, N. R. A., Badrujaman, A., and Hidayat, D. R. (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal factors (self-efficacy, hardiness, mindset, peer competition, character, etc.)</li> <li>• External factors (low social support, financial problems, less supportive signals when studying online,</li> </ul>

	etc.).
Pinto, V. N., Wasnik, S., Joshi, S. M., and Velankar, D. H. (2018)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Academic demands</li> <li>• Peer pressure</li> <li>• Inability to cope</li> <li>• Environmental stressors</li> </ul>
Rani et al., (2022)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Personal factors</li> <li>• Training factors</li> <li>• Academic environment</li> </ul>
Syahril, S., and Janna, S. R. (2021)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Cost factors (difficulty paying tuition fees / UKT and demands to return the scholarship),</li> <li>• study conditions (difficulty consulting with supervisors/promoters and unable to find references in the library),</li> <li>• personal problems (conflicts with friends or with a partner and less comfortable boarding/house conditions).</li> </ul>
Kamtsios, S., and Karagiannopoulou, E. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Lack of leisure time</li> <li>• Academic performance</li> <li>• Fear of failure</li> <li>• Academic overload</li> <li>• Finance</li> <li>• Competition between students</li> <li>• Relationships with university faculty</li> </ul>
Panda, S., Mandal, M., and Barman, R. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Demanding academic pressure</li> <li>• Limited social and personal time</li> <li>• Competition with other students</li> <li>• Failures</li> <li>• Lack of pocket money</li> <li>• Poor relationships with others</li> <li>• Overcrowded lecture halls</li> <li>• Semester system</li> <li>• Inadequate resources</li> </ul>
Qamar, K., Khan, N. S., and Bashir Kiani, M. R. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• New college environment</li> <li>• Student abuse</li> <li>• Tough study routines</li> <li>• Personal factors</li> <li>• Academic factors</li> <li>• Emotional factors</li> </ul>
Sajid, A., Ahmad, T., and Khalid, T. (2015)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Consecutive boring lectures</li> <li>• Lack of time for recreation</li> <li>• Gap between students and teachers</li> <li>• Difficulty selecting reading</li> </ul>

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There are different arrangements of the factors that might lead to stress. The most well-known kinds of these classifications are the inner, outer, academic, and health-related. Aisyah, Hasanuddin, and Munir (2023) and Chatterjee et al. (2023) have found a range of factors that can be incorporated to influence students' academic pressure. Likewise, Intelligence, Problem solving, self-efficacy, drive for accomplishment, and self-esteem may be connected to feelings of stress. Chatterjee et al. (2023) further distinguished a more extensive range of outer and inside factors that raise feelings of stress. They have recognized financial difficulty that the students might experience, combat capacity of the students, climate, confidence, mind stability, and self-inspiration as the main academic stressors. Harahap, Badrujaman, and Hidayat (2022) further revealed inside and outer factors influencing academic stress.

Obviously inside angles like self-efficacy, hardiness, mindset, peer competition, and character connect with outside issues like low social support, financial problems, and less supportive signals when studying online learning. The academic stress that medical students experience has gotten more consideration in the. More specifically, dental students may encounter stress-related factors such as personal factors, training factors, and academic environment as severe stressors that they encounter. At the point when Pinto et al. (2018) worked with medical students, they found that academic demands, peer pressure, inability to cope, and environmental stressors could all add to feelings of stress. New college environment, student abuse, tough study routines, personal factors, academic factors, and emotional factors are also identified as the severe stressors that medical students may encounter.

Studies also have proposed that there may be an association between students' feelings of stress and their recreation time. Kamtsios and Karagiannopoulou (2015) observed that one of the greatest reasons for stress among students is an absence of leisure time can lead to stress. Stress can likewise result from other factors like academic performance, fear of failure, academic overload, finance, competition between students, and poor relationships with university faculty. Panda, Mandal, and Barman, (2015) and Sajid, Ahmad, and Khalid, (2015) also reached the same agreement on the absence of leisure time. On the other hand, Sajid, Ahmad, and Khalid, (2015) additionally found that consecutive boring lectures, lack of time for recreation, gap between students, and teachers and difficulty selecting reading material are also led to stress among the students.

#### 4. Impact of Academic stress on Undergraduate students

##### 4.1. Impact on Academic Performance

Research has shown a strong and dynamic relationship between academic performance and stress. Some studies identify mostly negative effects and emphasize the importance of treatment focus and the context in which these relationships are found, whereas others emphasize the subtle interactions and potential benefits of stress. The body of research on how it affects performance complicates the picture, with differing research conclusions. Research by Ma

(2023) offers the concept of an "inverted U-shaped" integration, arguing that although moderate levels of stress can have a positive effect on academic achievement, high levels of stress can lead to negative effects by demonstrating the complexity of the stress performance association. Khatake, Twinkle, and Salgar (2022), in contrast, contend that there is only a negative relationship between academic stress and performance and that higher stress levels are linked to lower academic accomplishment. Most importantly, the idea that there could be a threshold for stress that is healthy is contested by this viewpoint. The study by Deng et al. (2022) explores the impacts of stress connected to home and school, and it finds a connection between stress and poor academic performance. This larger picture recognizes how different stresses are related to one another and how they affect students over time. Frank and Sharma (2022) on the other hand, highlighted the importance of stress perception and intensity, and implied that academic stress can have both beneficial and negative consequences on performance. From this angle, the stress-performance link can be moderated by individual variations and coping strategies. University students' performance and academic stress are positively correlated, according to Borah, Chitrakar, and Khatiwora (2022), challenging prevailing opinion. As a mediator between stress and academic failure, procrastination was proposed by Kuftyak (2022), providing insights into the behavioral elements that contribute to the stress-performance relationship. A substantial linear relationship between academic stress and performance is found by Oyewobi et al. (2021).

The COVID-19 pandemic's association between stress and academic performance is discussed by Tumonggor et al. (2021), who emphasize the importance of outside variables in shaping this dynamic. Lower academic performance is linked to increased stress levels, according to research by Daniel et al. (2018) and Abdullah et al. (2020), especially among undergraduate nursing students and students attending higher education institutions.

##### 4.2. Impact on Satisfaction

The association between academic stress and academic satisfaction that the students experience within their learning environment has been focused on many studies. The student's level of satisfaction or happiness can be significantly affected by the level of academic stress that the students experience within their learning environment. A study of academic stress and life satisfaction among university students conducted by Rathakrishnan et al. (2022) found that performance stress is negatively associated with life satisfaction, while academic self-perception is positively associated with life satisfaction. They further concluded that, all in all, academic self-perception and performance stress have an association with life satisfaction. Oducao and Estoque (2021) have focused their studies on identifying the relationship between stress and academic satisfaction and the results of the studies revealed that academic stress was negatively correlated with academic satisfaction. These findings agree with a wealth of research that students experiencing high levels of stress will have lower overall satisfaction regarding their educational experience. That may

affect such factors as engagement and academic achievement. Park, Yoo, and Lee (2020) find evidence for this perspective by highlighting a statistically significant negative correlation between college student satisfaction and academic stress. Addressing and managing the various sources of academic stress is critical to raising students' overall satisfaction with their chosen pathways. The results emphasize how important it is to understand that academic stress and satisfaction are mutually interactive. As to whether academic stress is an important factor in determining the level of student satisfaction with their educational experience, it seems perhaps that this occurs directly or indirectly through variables such as self-efficacy and resilience.

#### 4.3. Impact on Psychological Well-Being

Numerous studies support the strong association between academic stress and students' mental health. The study by Barbayannis et al. (2022) highlighted the negative effects that academic stress has on college students' mental health. Further, Yoonho (2022) highlighted the direct and indirect effects of academic stress on psychological well-being. This result is consistent with the research conducted by Johnston and Cassidy (2020), which shows a direct relationship between the psychological well-being of graduate students and the stress of academic expectations. All of these results suggest the possibility that stress related to expectations and performance may have long-term effects on students' mental health. The work of Rubach et al. (2022) confirmed the relationship between academic stress and mental health is stronger by gender. As indicated by the discoveries, female students are more likely than male students to have more awful psychological wellness because of academic stress. A study by Zhu et al. (2021) added to the body of knowledge by demonstrating a positive association between academic stress and depression, and highlighting the negative impact on mental health. Tan et al. (2022) focused on how mental health and academic achievement are interconnected. They explicitly dove into the connection between stress and results connected with emotional wellness. On a comparative note, Yingjamsiri et al. (2021) did a multifaceted study on emotional wellness among Thai clinical students, and their discoveries lined up with previous studies that stressed a mutual perspective across societies. This study not just pointed out the general effect of psychological well-being. By investigating these stressors, the literature is expected to uncover how they may be connected to psychological wellness issues. Eventually, the objective is to extend our understanding of how stress appears in changed social settings, revealing insight into the ways it influences emotional well-being.

#### 4.4. Impact on Physical Health

The evaluated research offers insightful information about the connection between academic stress and its effects on physical health. Studies that discuss the physical health component specifically highlight the complex effects of academic stress on a range of well-being factors. According to Zhu et al. (2021), academic stress has an impact on physical activity, sleep, anxiety, and depression among

Chinese students. The study connects academic stress to variables that might affect general well-being, including perhaps physical health issues, even if it does not directly address the consequences on health. According to Casuso-Holgado et al. (2019), there is a modest relationship between physical health symptoms, particularly physical weariness, and academic stress. This research highlights the real-world effects of academic stress on people's physiological states and suggests that persistent stress may cause symptoms related to physical health. Using a more thorough approach, Shankar and Park (2016) investigated how stress affects mental, physical, and overall academic performance. Although academic stress is not the only topic of discussion in the study, placing it in the larger context highlights the reality that stress is known to affect many aspects of well-being, including physical health. Students who experience academic stress are more likely to feel exhausted and have lower-quality sleep. Accordingly, the possibility that academic stress and physical health are directly related, which may have an impact on sleep cycles and energy levels. Although not all the research explicitly addressed how academic stress impacts physical health, it shows various adverse consequences.

#### 5. Stress Coping Strategies for Undergraduates

The undergraduate students follow different stress coping strategies to deal with stress. Especially, the literature has focused more on identifying these strategies for those who are studying health sciences and medicine. They use different methods to manage stress. It can be doing activities that help them relax or using specific techniques for academic stress. This proposes a complete way to deal with stress, which includes recognizing what makes stress and ways to deal with it. Students additionally use coping strategies like handling stress properly, avoiding stressors, seeking support, and taking care of themselves. Even though, it does not suggest explicit methods, it accentuates the importance of self-care by aligning with the idea of holistic stress management. Hatunoglu (2020) found that students utilize positive ways of behaving and social help to adapt to stress. This social-based approach recommends that having great ways of behaving and getting support from others can assist with overseeing stress. According to Mangaiarkkarsi and Akshita (2023), both undergraduate and postgraduate students frequently employ positive reframing, and self-distraction as stress management strategies. These survival strategies are reliable with both mental and emotional mediation. Benjet (2020) accentuates the worth of CBT-based programs in the context of stress coping. Even though there are no specific techniques for undergraduates, the inclusion of CBT-based therapy raises the possibility of cognitive restructuring in stress management. The coping strategies utilized by students to deal with their academic stress have been studied by Gayathri et al. (2022). Utilizing related experiences to settle challenges, searching out companions for discussion, conversing with loved ones, getting sufficient rest, and keeping a hopeful standpoint can be identified as favored coping strategies. These outcomes offer an exhaustive comprehension of coping methods that consider social and mental viewpoints. The study led by Noordeen et al. (2018) looks at how undergraduate medical students deal with stress.

Entertainment, sleeping, talking with friends and family, and focusing on religious activities are among the strategies that have been found. Accordingly, these methods, which include physical activities, social support, positive behaviors, cognitive restructuring, and holistic well-being approaches, demonstrate the significance of a variety of approaches to stress management.

## 6. Discussion

Many factors cause stress to undergraduate students which could be seen through the review of the literature. Mental, physical as well as emotional well-being have significant influences and are already found in the situation through internal means like problem-solving efficiency and self-belief processes and external sources such as family and how much money one has. Similarly, academic stress is seen in a different way across programs since students studying medical and dental are expected to meet higher academic standards. The importance of knowing and identifying specific stress factors is huge since this guides stress management. Stress impairs students' lives on social, personal, and emotional levels. The link between academic stress and how one performs in their learning environment is complicated. According to studies, this relationship can have both adverse and good effects. Although a small amount of stress has the potential to improve performance, chronic stress can result in reduced efficiency. Stress strongly affects educational goals and there have to be smarter strategies to address the situation. Similarly, research shows the relationships where are among academic stress, academic satisfaction, mental health, and physical health. Lower satisfaction levels and various physical symptoms are formed when stress is high. This affects a person completely; mentally, emotionally, and physically. The undergraduate students can have unique strategies to deal with stress because there is not a single way to do it. To combat stress and other obstacles, one can improve their thinking patterns with specific behavior. It is important to include self-care activities in our lives and use CBT techniques to manage stress to improve a standardized approach to student well-being. It is clear that individuals face stress differently and to address this an individualized approach should be taken. Learning the source of stress, and its negative impact will improve our interventions towards better mental health. To provide an efficient learning environment, educational institutes need to implement some kind of support mechanism that aims to tackle both internal and external stressors. Furthermore, the research findings quite clearly show that dealing with stress should not only include physical or emotional health but also look after cognitive and spiritual well-being. By initiating modules concerning managing stress, increasing resilience, and providing counselling services, the education institutions can be nurtured to support students' endeavours.

## 7. Conclusion and Limitations

Academic stress is a condition of mental or emotional strain brought on by the expectations and pressures coming through the demands of the educational setting. Many

descriptive studies have been conducted to determine the degree of academic stress that students encounter, and have found that undergraduates experience moderate to severe levels of stress due to the expectations and pressures coming through the demands of the educational setting. The literature offers a comprehensive variety of effects of stress on academic performance, satisfaction, psychological well-being, and physical fitness. Thus, the complicated connection between psychological health, physical health, and satisfaction points to a need for complete therapies. The study of stress management techniques also points out the importance of a balanced approach to dealing with stress. A broad classification of strategies ranges from specialized forms meant especially to help the student cope with academic pressure, through a variety of integrative stress-relieving practices. Holistic wellness approaches, positive behaviors including self-care and social support as well as thinking restructuring collectively suggest that it is the breadth of treatments available that fosters student well-being overall. The review illustrates how stress among undergraduate students is impacting their learning experience, but also has some limitations. Most of the literature that was reviewed had a similar constraint by design with descriptive and cross-sectional studies. In the future, researchers can use longitudinal designs to better understand how academic stress changes over time. This proposed approach can give a comprehensive view of the time dynamics for anxiety inducers, and how they affect students all along their academic journey. The cultural context cannot be ignored because it impacts how academic stress is processed or dealt with. Most of the researches under consideration are targeted towards certain cultural norms; leading to a barrier in recognizing across a wider and more varied sample space. To recognize the deeper roles that stress plays and how it shapes individuals, more research needs to be done on it. It is important to modify interventions so that they take into account the stress faced by diverse students with a cultural sensitivity lens. Hence, identifying the limitations will result in a turning point for refined research trials among stressed students. To effectively deal with that academic stress, researchers can devise future studies in a way that allows them to better understand the nature of this stress.

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