

Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction among College Students

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Abstract

The present study examined the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among college students. Perceived stress refers to the extent to which individuals appraise their life circumstances as stressful, whereas life satisfaction reflects a person's cognitive evaluation of the quality of his or her life. A correlational research design was proposed. For purposes of demonstrating the statistical presentation of a journal manuscript, a synthetic dataset of 200 college students was used; these results are illustrative and must not be presented as observations collected from real participants. Perceived stress was assessed using the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10), and life satisfaction was assessed using the Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). In the synthetic analysis, perceived stress was negatively correlated with life satisfaction ($r = -.52, p < .001$). A simple linear regression indicated that perceived stress significantly predicted life satisfaction, $R^2 = .27, F(1, 198) = 73.35, p < .001$. The findings are consistent with published research indicating that higher stress is generally associated with poorer well-being among university students. Recent research has also shown a direct negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction and has identified coping strategies and personality traits as potentially important explanatory factors. The study highlights the importance of stress-management, coping-skills, social-support, and well-being programs in higher education.

Keywords: *perceived stress, life satisfaction, college students, psychological well-being, stress management, higher education*

1. Introduction

College and university years represent an important developmental period involving academic demands, social adjustment, financial concerns, career decisions, and increasing personal responsibility. These demands may contribute to perceived stress, particularly when students believe that available resources are insufficient to meet the demands they face. At the same time, students' overall evaluation of their lives may be affected by academic experiences, relationships, health, financial circumstances, and perceptions of future opportunities.

Cohen, Kamarck, and Mermelstein (1983) developed the Perceived Stress Scale to assess the degree to which situations in life are appraised as stressful. Their validation work included two college-student samples and demonstrated adequate reliability and validity of the measure. Life

satisfaction, in contrast, is a cognitive component of subjective well-being and refers to an individual's global judgment of how satisfied they are with their life (Diener et al., 1985).

Existing evidence suggests that stress and well-being are closely related in university populations. A systematic literature review found that quality of life was frequently negatively associated with stress among university students, with insomnia and burnout also contributing to deterioration in quality of life (Ribeiro et al., 2018). A 2025 systematic review and meta-analysis found a pooled perceived-stress prevalence of 64.72% across 26 studies involving 7,828 university students in Africa, with sleep problems and financial difficulties among significant associated factors (Fentahun et al., 2025).

More directly, recent research on university students has reported that perceived stress negatively predicts life satisfaction and that coping strategies can mediate this relationship, while some personality characteristics may moderate it (Zhang & Zhao, 2025). A study of 477 undergraduate students also examined perceived stress and life satisfaction in relation to college belonging, major belonging, and extracurricular participation (Çivitci, 2015).

Despite the growing literature, college students differ substantially in their sources of stress and available resources. The present paper therefore focuses specifically on the association between perceived stress and life satisfaction and considers implications for educational and psychological support in higher education.

2. Review of Related Literature

2.1 Perceived Stress

Perceived stress concerns subjective appraisal rather than simply the number of stressful events experienced. Two students may encounter similar academic demands but perceive them differently depending on coping resources, social support, self-efficacy, personality, and prior experiences. The Perceived Stress Scale was specifically designed to capture this appraisal of unpredictability, uncontrollability, and overload (Cohen et al., 1983).

2.2 Life Satisfaction

Life satisfaction is a cognitive evaluation of one's life as a whole. The Satisfaction With Life Scale developed by Diener et al. (1985) is a brief measure of this global judgment. Unlike measures of temporary mood, life satisfaction reflects a broader evaluative component of subjective well-being.

2.3 Stress and Student Well-Being

Higher stress among university students has been associated with poorer health-related quality of life, sleep problems, burnout, and psychological difficulties. Ribeiro et al. (2018) concluded that stress was frequently negatively associated with quality of life among university students.

2.4 Stress and Life Satisfaction

The relationship between stress and life satisfaction is theoretically consistent with transactional models of stress. When individuals perceive demands as exceeding their coping resources, prolonged stress may reduce positive functioning and affect evaluations of life circumstances. Recent university-student research provides direct evidence that perceived stress negatively predicts life satisfaction and that coping and personality may influence the strength of the relationship (Zhang & Zhao, 2025).

3. Theoretical Framework

3.1 Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional theory proposes that stress depends on the individual's appraisal of environmental demands and perceived coping resources. Primary appraisal concerns whether an event is threatening, harmful, or challenging, while secondary appraisal concerns available coping resources.

3.2 Subjective Well-Being Perspective

Subjective well-being includes cognitive judgments such as life satisfaction as well as affective experiences. From this perspective, chronic or poorly managed stress may negatively influence the way students evaluate their overall lives.

3.3 Conservation of Resources Perspective

Hobfoll's (1989) conservation of resources theory suggests that individuals strive to obtain, retain, and protect valued resources. Persistent academic, financial, social, or time-related stress may represent actual or perceived resource loss and thereby reduce well-being.

4. Objectives of the Study

- To assess perceived stress among college students.
- To assess life satisfaction among college students.
- To examine the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction.
- To determine whether perceived stress significantly predicts life satisfaction.
- To discuss educational and psychological implications for student support.

5. Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among college students.
- H2: Perceived stress significantly predicts life satisfaction among college students.



6. Method

6.1 Research Design

A quantitative, cross-sectional correlational design was selected because the primary purpose was to examine the association between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

6.2 Participants

For demonstration of journal-style statistical reporting, a synthetic sample of 200 college students was generated. The illustrative sample comprised 104 women (52.0%) and 96 men (48.0%), with an assumed age range of 18–24 years ($M = 20.7$, $SD = 1.6$). These are synthetic values and do not represent actual participants.

6.3 Instruments

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10). The PSS was developed by Cohen et al. (1983) to assess perceived stress. The 10-item version is widely used in student and adult populations. Items are rated on a five-point response scale, with higher total scores indicating greater perceived stress.

Satisfaction With Life Scale (SWLS). The SWLS developed by Diener et al. (1985) consists of five items assessing global cognitive judgments of life satisfaction. Higher scores indicate greater life satisfaction.

6.4 Procedure

In a real study, participants would be recruited through an appropriate college sampling procedure after obtaining institutional ethical approval and informed consent. Participants would complete the PSS-10 and SWLS anonymously. For this manuscript, no real participant data were collected; the Results section uses synthetic values solely to demonstrate appropriate statistical reporting.

6.5 Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics were used to summarize the variables. Pearson's product-moment correlation was used to examine the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Simple linear regression was used to test whether perceived stress significantly predicted life satisfaction. Statistical significance was evaluated at the .05 level.

7. Results

IMPORTANT: The following numerical results are synthetic and are included solely as an illustrative model for a research paper. They must be replaced with actual participant data before submission to a journal.

7.1 Descriptive Statistics

Variable	N	Mean	SD	Possible Range
Perceived Stress (PSS-10)	200	21.84	5.62	0–40
Life Satisfaction (SWLS)	200	21.17	5.41	5–35

The synthetic sample showed a mean perceived-stress score of 21.84 (SD = 5.62) and a mean life-satisfaction score of 21.17 (SD = 5.41).

7.2 Correlation between Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction

Variables	N	Pearson r	p
Perceived Stress – Life Satisfaction	200	–.52	< .001

The synthetic correlation analysis indicated a statistically significant negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction, $r = -.52$, $p < .001$. Thus, students reporting higher perceived stress tended to report lower life satisfaction. Hypothesis H1 was supported in the synthetic dataset.

7.3 Regression Analysis

Predictor	R	R ²	Adjusted R ²	F	p
Perceived Stress	.52	.27	.27	73.35	< .001

A simple linear regression was conducted with life satisfaction as the dependent variable and perceived stress as the predictor. The model was statistically significant, $R^2 = .27$, $F(1, 198) = 73.35$, $p < .001$, indicating that perceived stress accounted for approximately 27% of the variance in life satisfaction in the synthetic dataset.

Predictor	B	SE B	β	p
Perceived Stress	–0.50	0.058	–.52	< .001

The regression coefficient was negative, indicating that higher perceived stress was associated with lower predicted life satisfaction. Hypothesis H2 was supported in the synthetic dataset.

8. Discussion

The purpose of this study was to examine the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among college students. The synthetic analysis demonstrated a moderate-to-strong negative association ($r = -.52$), with perceived stress explaining 27% of the variance in life satisfaction. This pattern is consistent with the broader literature showing that stress is associated with poorer quality of life and well-being among university students (Ribeiro et al., 2018).

The finding is also consistent with recent research directly examining perceived stress and life satisfaction among university students, which reported that stress negatively predicts life

satisfaction and that coping strategies and personality traits can influence the relationship (Zhang & Zhao, 2025).

The results should not be interpreted as evidence that stress alone causes low life satisfaction. Because a correlational cross-sectional design does not establish temporal order, lower life satisfaction could also increase students' perceptions of stress. Other variables—including financial circumstances, sleep, social support, coping style, personality, academic workload, and physical activity—may contribute to both variables.

The educational implications are important. Fentahun et al. (2025) found that perceived stress was widespread among university students in their meta-analysis and that sleep problems and financial difficulties were associated with higher stress. Ribeiro et al. (2018) similarly identified insomnia and burnout as factors associated with poorer quality of life.

9. Educational and Psychological Implications

- Colleges should provide accessible stress-management and psychological-support services.
- Orientation and academic-advising programs should include coping, time management, and realistic academic planning.
- Student-support systems should pay attention to sleep, financial difficulties, social isolation, and other factors associated with stress.
- Institutions can strengthen belonging and peer support through mentoring, clubs, and constructive extracurricular opportunities.
- Counselling services can use evidence-based approaches to improve coping and reduce persistent stress.
- Faculty can contribute by communicating academic expectations clearly and providing timely feedback.
- Well-being programs should emphasize skills and resources rather than simply advising students to reduce stress.

10. Limitations

The principal limitation of the present manuscript is that its numerical Results are synthetic. They are provided only to demonstrate how a publication-style empirical paper could report descriptive statistics, correlation, and regression. No claim should be made that the reported sample, means, correlations, or regression coefficients were obtained from actual students. In addition, the proposed design is cross-sectional and correlational, which limits causal inference. Future research should use larger and more diverse samples, longitudinal designs, and multiple measures of student well-being.

11. Recommendations for Future Research

- Replicate the study with actual college and university samples from different disciplines.
- Use longitudinal designs to examine changes in stress and life satisfaction over academic semesters.

- Test coping strategies, social support, resilience, and self-efficacy as mediators or moderators.
- Examine differences by academic year, gender, residence, socioeconomic circumstances, and field of study where theoretically justified.
- Include sleep, physical activity, academic workload, and financial stress in multivariable models.
- Evaluate institutional stress-management and well-being interventions.

12. Conclusion

Perceived stress and life satisfaction are important psychological variables in higher education. Existing evidence indicates that stress is commonly associated with poorer well-being among university students, while recent research directly supports a negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. The illustrative synthetic analysis presented here similarly shows a significant negative association. However, these numerical results are not empirical findings and must be replaced with real data before journal submission.

A comprehensive student-well-being approach should address coping skills, social support, sleep, financial and academic pressures, psychological services, and opportunities for belonging. Supporting students' capacity to manage demands may contribute not only to psychological well-being but also to a more positive overall evaluation of their lives.

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