

# Academic Stress and Coping Mechanism

K. Saipragathi<sup>1</sup>, Y. Divya Sri<sup>2</sup>, M. Srinivas Sharma<sup>3</sup>, C. Sai Siva Ankam Chowdary<sup>4</sup>, MS.M. Ramya Sree<sup>5</sup>

<sup>1,2,3,4</sup>Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation

<sup>5</sup>Associate Professor, Koneru Lakshmaiah Education Foundation

**Abstract**—Academic stress is experienced by every student at least once in their academic journey. Stress can negatively affect students' ability to retain information, concentrate, and perform well on exams. By understanding this concept, development of effective strategies becomes possible. This study explored individualized coping mechanisms, behavioral and physical symptoms, and the integration of time management and prioritization practices. Using a survey-based approach, both qualitative and quantitative data were collected from 82 participants, the majority of whom were undergraduate students. The survey gathered key data on sources of stress, task prioritization, coping mechanisms and suggestions for improvement under stressful situations. The data analysis discovered that students found social support (family and friends), and time management to be the most effective techniques for reducing stress. Interestingly, only 30% of students had consulted counselors or health professionals for academic related issues. It was observed that students prioritize tasks based on both importance and proximity to submission of the academic tasks. This research contributes to understanding highly used coping mechanisms and additional resources required by students, while also providing insights regarding the awareness students have of this fundamental concept. It helps professionals design customized solutions for students. More studies should focus on understanding broader perspectives on academic stress, involving academic advisors, parents and students for a deeper understanding.

**Index Terms**—Task prioritization, effective strategies and student's opinions

## I. INTRODUCTION:

A survey conducted in America has resulted in 72% of young adults aged 18-34 dealing with mental health as their top stressor, with academic stress as the leading factor (APA's 2023). It is also found that proximity to exams and high academic expectations majorly associate with mental health issues such as anxiety, depression and even the thoughts of self-harm.

Academic stress has become one of the prevalent components among the students; inevitably, it is a concept to be explored. The inadequate knowledge of academic stress can result in uncertainty and emotional intolerance. Due to the severity of academic stress, it has become vital to know the ways in which students or the young adults can escape the negative implications.

The coping mechanisms on the other hand, are a reliable choice that provides additional support to mitigate the negative forces. Coping mechanisms generate a state of relaxation allowing individuals to process and bounce back, acting.

While many studies have examined academic stress, there is limited data on the opinions regarding coping mechanisms for academic stress. Understanding their perspectives and beliefs can foster the development of new innovative solutions and help create customized strategies, ensuring that every student finds them convincing and suitable to use.

This study explores integration of time management and prioritization practices, social media as a coping strategy, the impact of family and friends under stress, and the coping mechanisms that students find most effective. The goal is to understand the students' perspectives, help create customized strategies, ensure that every student finds them convincing and suitable to use.

The study survey includes majority of undergraduate students, identifying the primary sources of their stress, various symptoms, their use coping mechanisms, and whether these mechanisms are majorly positive or negative. Additionally, we surveyed a few master's students to determine if there are any significant differences in the stress levels compared to the undergraduates.

## II. LITERATURE REVIEW

Awareness on academic stress allows students to develop effective coping mechanisms, eventually improving their confidence and performance. This literature review studies the key components, focusing on causes, symptoms and ideal coping mechanisms that are impactful and adoptive. Additionally, emphasizing the research gaps for further studies.

#### A. Causes of Stress:

A study (Krishan Lal, 2014, AIJHASS14) conducted has resulted in following as the sources of academic stress:

**Environment:** Students matriculating for tertiary education are one of the causes of stress, as this transition requires them to move out of their homes and start a new lifestyle in a new environment. This change can cause stress for some students as they try to fit in and learn to live on their own.

**Extra Co-curricular:** Joining the college clubs, choirs, band, or engaging in volunteer work is important as these activities are considered valuable capabilities on a job application. On the contrary, this discourages students who are unable to get involved, leading to stress and demotivation.

**Peers:** Peer connections and behaviors can cause stress. This can be associated with peers being mean, making others feel left out, unworthy, lacking, or unfit.

**Parental Pressure:** The parental pressure is faced by students because their parents want them to succeed. Parents hope for their children to get good grades and achieve things, but many parents fail to notice how pressured the students feel.

Another study (M.S.A Rahim,2016) conducted has discovered heavy workload as a source; Not all students can keep up with heavy workloads; it requires a lot of management and planning skills. Students who are unable to manage their can encounter nervousness and anxiety, leading to stress and affecting their mental health.

**Unhealthy Lifestyle:** It is also reported that students with poor lifestyle habits are more likely to face higher levels of academic stress.

**Financial Concerns:** Unmet financial needs, such as paying expensive tuition fees, clearing student loans and inflation in living expenses students under pressure (Baker, Amanda R & Catherine P. Montalto. 2019).

#### B. Symptoms of Stress:

**Anxiety:** Studies (Zang.C, 2022) has found that the anxiety symptoms are positively correlated with

academic stress, meaning academic stress leads to mental health issues.

**Depression:** Both family and academic stress causes depression in students, resulting in poor performances in academics.

**Decreased Motivation:** Students can feel overwhelmed and unmotivated due to increased level of academic stress.

**Headaches:** Studies found that stress is a contributing factor in development of tension-type headaches, showing correlation between stress and muscle tension.

**Digestive Issues:** The psychological stress can stimulate and intensify gastrointestinal distress (2019).

**Insomnia:** The poor sleep quality has been a major issue for students with higher stress levels.

**Procrastination:** Workload can overwhelm students and create a fear of failure- that they will not meet the expectations-leading them to delay starting their work.

#### C. Coping Mechanisms:

##### Positive mechanisms:

**Physical activities:** A way to cope with excessive stress and helps empower brain health; preparing students for the day, can improve sleep quality, which is crucial for academic performance.

**Seeking Social Support:** It is found beneficial and emotionally relieving to participate in conversations with family, friends, or counselors.

**Time Management:** Having set a plan for the activities in advance can reduce the feelings of being overwhelmed.

**Mindfulness and Meditation:** Practicing mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR) can help students improve their mood and reduce anxiety.

##### Negative mechanisms:

**Avoidance behaviors:** This contains delaying or evading academic work, which may help in enduring stress for long-term. However, analysis indicates that these neglectful coping strategies, such as procrastination, are associated with high stress levels.

**Substance Use:** The intake of substances like alcohol or drugs is also a mode of escaping from stress for some students. Over time, there is a risk of students becoming addicted to them and suffering from health issues.

**Overeating or Undereating:** Unhealthy eating patterns are commonly noticed among the students facing academic stress which may affect their physical health and academic performance.

Excessive Screen Time: To seek diversion, students often find their mobile phones to be a way to dismiss their academic responsibilities for some time. This helps them to relax for a while but in the long-term, it may affect the attention span of the students.

### III. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To analyze how students implement prioritization.
2. To examine primary sources of academic stress and effective positive & negative coping mechanism among students.
3. To understand students' opinions on standard coping mechanisms.
4. To derive the need for resources to help students with stress reduction.

### IV. RESEARCH METHODOLOGIES

This study utilizes a survey-based approach including both qualitative and quantitative data, to investigate

the stress level of various students while they perform academic activities and how this affects their mental and physical health.

#### Design of research

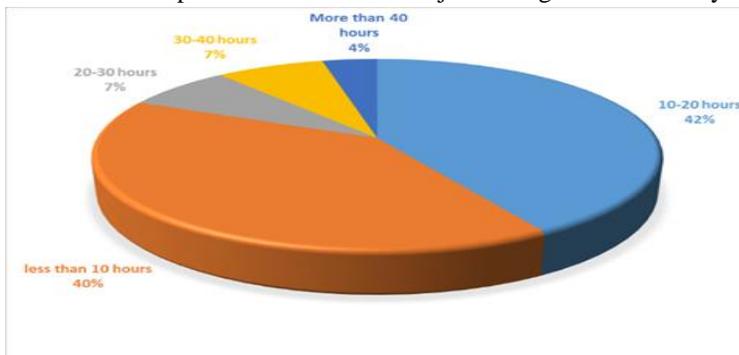
This research was designed as mixed-method research, focusing on both qualitative and the quantitative data. As mentioned above, this study applies a survey-based approach, incorporating qualitative methods to understand various opinions of the students, how they react to different stages of academic stress and how they develop coping mechanisms. On the other hand, quantitative design focuses on collecting numerical data in the form of percentages through pie charts about the primary sources of academic stress, relaxation techniques to reduce stress etc. and analyzing it statistically.

our survey includes 82 participants; students that are mostly undergraduate.

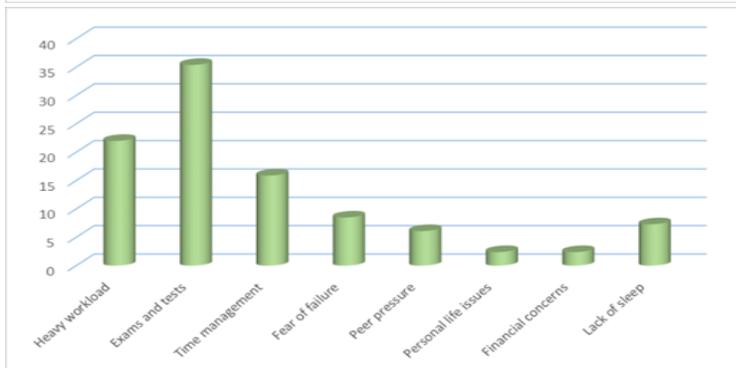
This study respected ethical standards by protecting participants' anonymity and confidentiality, and the data was used only for research purposes

### V. DATA ANALYSIS:

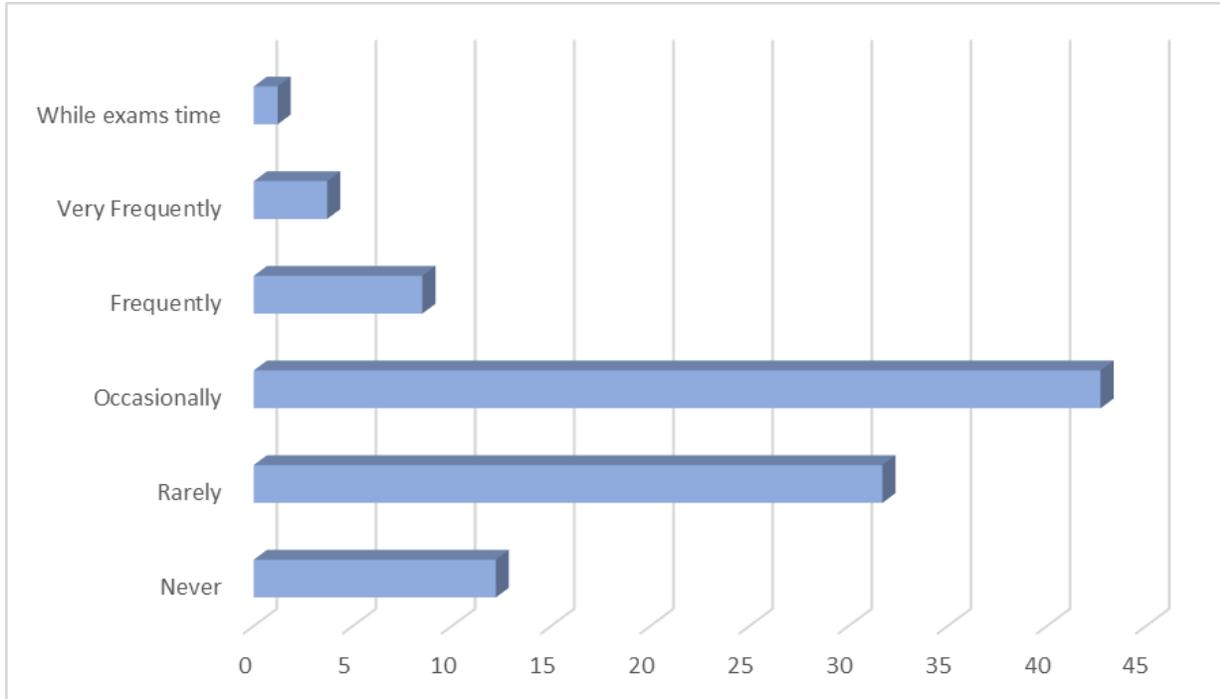
Here is the data presentation of a few major findings from the study



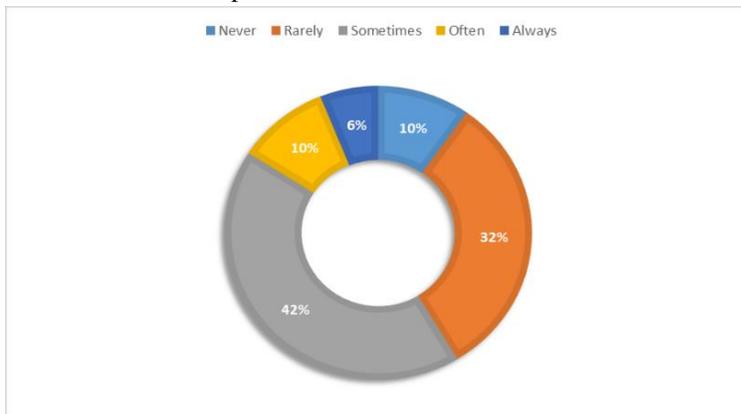
- ❖ The hours students spent on academics each week; 42% reported that they spent around 10 to 20 hours, while 40% spent less than 10 hours.



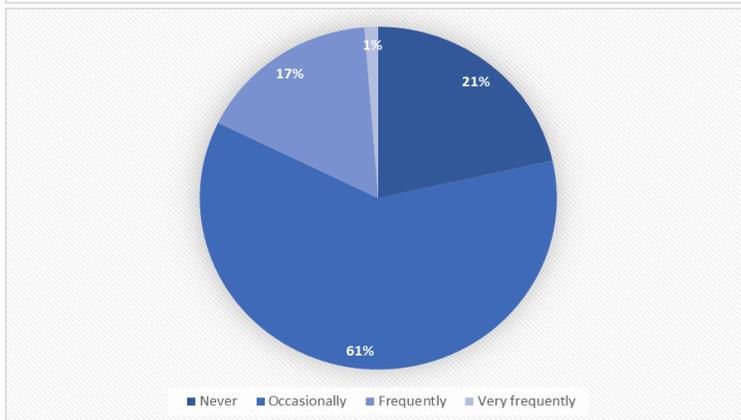
- ❖ The results show the primary stress as exams and tests, while heavy workload takes the second position in causing academic stress.



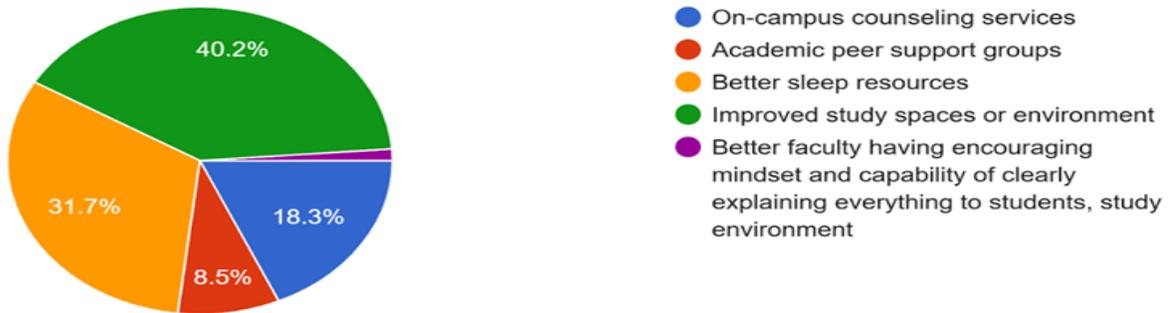
- The survey concludes 42.7% of students occasionally experienced feelings anxiety or panic related to the academics while 31% rarely affected by it. Interestingly, 12.2% from the participants felt panic and anxiety while the exams period.



❖ Nearly 42% of the students have procrastinated while facing their academic tasks



❖ The reports show 61% students using coping mechanisms like meditation and mindfulness occasionally.



- Nearly 40.2% of the students wanted improved study spaces and environment that would help to manage their academic stress better and also 31.7% of students wanted better sleeping resources.

## VI. FINDINGS

These findings provide insights into the primary sources of academic stress, its effects, and students' perceptions of coping strategies, among other factors, based on responses from 82 students.

### 1. Demographics of Respondents:

Among all the respondents, 85.4% fell within the age range of 18 to 25 years. About 85% were pursuing bachelor's degree programs, while the remaining 15% were pursuing master's degree. The participants came from various disciplines, including engineering, arts and humanities, science, and primarily business

### 2. Study Habits and Sources of Stress:

On average, the participants indicated that they spent 10-20 hours or less on study related activities. The primary sources of stress comprise exams (35.4%), Heavy workloads & assignments (22%), Time management (15.9%) and Fear of failure (8.5%). Academic tasks like exams and assignments caused more stress as reported by 63.5% participants.

### 3. Physical and Emotional symptoms of academic stress:

A significant proportion of students (76.5%) are suffering from headaches and the rest are experiencing insomnia and immunity loss. Regarding emotional symptoms, 42% of the students have occasionally experienced anxiety.

### 4. Task Management and Stress Perception:

Apparently, 52.4% of the participants prioritize stress equally based on deadlines and the importance of the task, while 61% acknowledged having some difficulty

in balancing academic demands with other aspects of life. Furthermore, 51.2% are unsure about the prevalence of stress among master's students.

### 5. Coping mechanisms:

The positive mechanisms practiced by the participants includes talking to friends and family (25.6%), time management (23.2%), and taking regular breaks (17.1%). Physical exercises were practiced by 35.4% once a week, 26.8% 2-3 times a week, and only 9.8% do it every day. Moreover, Medication and mindfulness is practiced by 58.5% occasionally while 20% do it frequently.

The negative mechanisms include procrastination, which is practiced by 42.7% sometimes, while 35.4% of participants use social media frequently, and 18.3% use it very frequently.

### 6. Students' opinions on coping strategies:

Reportedly, 76.8% students believe that management techniques like planning and to-do lists helps in reducing stress. Moreover, coping mechanisms like practicing meditation and mindfulness are followed by a significant proportion of them, believing in their effectiveness for stress reduction.

### 7. Negative feedback from professors and peers:

The survey resulted in 47.6% students taking the negative comments constructively, viewing criticism as an opportunity to grow, while 36.6% ignores the comments.

### 8. Support and Resources needed:

It is found that 40.2% would consider it beneficial to have improved study spaces and environments, while 31.7% regard having better sleep resources as a way to manage academic stress more effectively.

Interestingly, we have discovered that 70.7% have never received help from a counselor or a mental health professional.

## VII. DISCUSSIONS

The motive of this study was to identify effective and common coping mechanisms, students' opinions, task prioritization, and their views on additional assistance or the need for any improvement in stressful situations. The findings disclosed that the students prioritize tasks equally based on importance and proximity of the submission (deadlines). Also, many students seem to know the positive coping mechanisms and their benefits but very less students utilizes them on a regular basis.

In the study, we found that our participants' causes of stress were mostly derived from exams and heavy workloads, along with assignments. Meanwhile, our literature review displays sources of stress such as the environment, extracurricular activities, and parental pressure. Similarly, common stress symptoms like headache and insomnia were revealed. Moreover, we can also notice corresponding coping mechanisms like seeking social support, time management, and the use of digital media.

The results help institutions in understanding the needs of the students to control academic stress and come up with customized and ore practical coping mechanisms. Also emphasizing on factors like negative feedbacks, balancing academic demands, and lack of awareness on mental health professionals in helping with academic stress.

Limitations to our study includes smaller sample size and limiting the diversity of academic levels which may not be large to generalize the findings to a broader population. The study entirely focuses on students, excluding the perspectives of parents, academic advisors, health professional, which could have provided in-depth insights. Also, holds possibilities of participants rushing through the responses due to 22 questions especially at the end of the survey. Future research should examine different perspectives of the academic advisors and teaching faculties on key symptoms observed in the students due to stress. Also analyzing the students 'behavior before and after providing better studying environment.

## VIII. CONCLUSION

The main purpose of the study is to explore and understand the sources of academic

stress among the students, particularly focusing on the coping mechanisms they use to manage stress.

The study aims at analyzing how students implement strategies like time management and their priorities. By examining both positive and negative coping strategies, the study seeks to gain insights into how students can be better supported in managing academic stress.

The findings emphasize the need for universities to offer more resources, including improved study environments and better access to counseling services, to support students in managing academic stress. Despite acknowledging the benefits of coping mechanisms, the study revealed that only a small percentage of students regularly implement them suggesting a gap in awareness and motivation to engage with these strategies.

## CITATIONS

- [1] <https://www.apa.org/news/press/releases/stress/2023/collective-trauma-recovery>
- [2] Krishan Lal, American International Journal of Research in Humanities, Arta and Social Sciences, 2014
- [3] AIJRHASS14-150-libre.pdf
- [4] Baker, A.R., & Montalto, C.P. (2019). Student Loan Debt and Financial Stress: Implications for Academic Performance. *Journal of College Student Development* 60(1), 115-120. <https://dx.doi.org/10.1353/csd.2019.0008>.
- [5] Zhang C, Shi L, Tian T, Zhou Z, Peng X, Shen Y, Li Y, Ou J. Associations Between Academic Stress and Depressive Symptoms Mediated by Anxiety Symptoms and Hopelessness Among Chinese College Students. *Psychol Res Behav Manag.* 2022; 15:547-556
- [6] <https://doi.org/10.2147/PRBM.S353778>
- [7] Deng Y, Cherian J, Khan NUN, Kumari K, Sial MS, Comite U, Gavurova B and Popp J (2022) Family and Academic Stress and Their Impact on Students' Depression Level and Academic Performance. *Front. Psychiatry* 13:869337. doi:10.3389/fpsy.2022.869337
- [8] Yang M, Viladrich C and Cruz J (2022) Examining the relationship between academic

- stress and motivation toward physical education within a semester: A two-wave study with Chinese secondary school students. *Front. Psychol.* 13:965690. doi: 10.3389/fpsyg.2022.965690
- [9] Cathcart S, Winefield AH, Lushington K, Rolan P. Stress and tension-type headache mechanisms. *Cephalalgia.* 2010;30(10):1250-1267. doi:10.1177/0333102410362927
- [10] Carrión-Pantoja S, Prados G, Chouchou F, Holguín M, Mendoza-Vinces Á, Expósito-Ruiz M, Fernández-Puerta L. Insomnia Symptoms, Sleep Hygiene, Mental Health, and Academic Performance in Spanish University Students: A Cross-Sectional Study. *Journal of Clinical Medicine.* 2022; 11(7):1989. <https://doi.org/10.3390/jcm11071989>
- [11] Bedewy D, Gabriel A. Examining perceptions of academic stress and its sources among university students: The Perception of Academic Stress Scale. *Health Psychology Open.* 2015;2(2). doi:10.1177/2055102915596714
- [12] Salazar-Granizo YE, Hueso-Montoro C, Caparros-Gonzalez RA. Lifestyles and Academic Stress in University Students of Health Sciences: A Mixed-Methodology Study. *Healthcare.* 2024; 12(14):1384. <https://doi.org/10.3390/healthcare12141384>
- [13] Reddy K. J, Menon K. R, Thattil A. Academic Stress and its Sources Among University Students. *Biomed Pharmacol J* 2018;11(1).
- [14] Putwain, D. (2007), Researching academic stress and anxiety in students: some methodological considerations. *British Educational Research Journal,* 33: 207-219. <https://doi.org/10.1080/01411920701208258>