

# Undergraduate Students Experience of Stress

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## Abstract

Prior research has found that while undergraduate college students experience high levels of stress, the types of stress varies greatly (American College Health Association, 2021). This study examined self-reports of types of stress and perceptions of stress among a college undergraduate students. The highest reported categories of stress included stress about the future, finances, studying, and competing demands. Results interpreted from a strengths-oriented perspective, suggesting that undergraduate students' stressors demonstrate understanding of societal struggles.

## Background Research

- Within higher education, the experience of stress varies significantly among students, though recent studies show that undergraduate college students are experiencing high levels of stress (e.g., American College Health Association, 2021).
- Barbayannis and colleagues (2022) surveyed 843 college students from across the United States and evaluated whether academic stress levels affected their mental health.
- They found a significant correlation between worse academic stress and poor mental well-being in all the students, who also reported an exacerbation of stress in response to the pandemic.

## Participants

- Undergraduate students at Delaware Valley University (N=212)
- While sample was diverse, the majority of participants identified as
  - Female (n=154)
  - White (n=167)
  - Middle class (n=109)

## Measures

- Demographics
- Emerging Adult Stress Inventory (EASI: Murray, Crisp, Burns, & Byrne, 2020): Participants rated 39 items using a 5-point Likert scale; yielded subscale scores for stress of family/home life, study, future uncertainty, competing demands, peers/friend
- Perceived Stress Scale (PSS: Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983): Participants rated 10 items using a 5-point Likert scale; yielded one overall score of global perceived stress

## Procedures

- Completed online self-reported questionnaires
- First, compared highest types of stress using EASI scores
- Then, selected participants to represent each type of high stress group
  - Compared groups scores on overall global perceived stress using PSS scores

## Results

### Highest types of stress

- Future (52)
- Finances (50%)
- Competing demands (39%)
- Studying (33%)

### Perceptions of stress

- Used ANOVA and post-hoc LSD tests
- Students in the high study stress group reported significantly greater perceived stress than students in other stress type groups

## Discussion

From a strengths-oriented perspective, students' experiences of stress indicate high awareness of societal struggles and global environment.

It is important to note that many participants indicated multiple areas of high stress.

Future research can examine nuances in experiences of stress and consider how to support students while recognizing their rationality.

## References

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