

## Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction Among University Students

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— *Review of* —  
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### ABSTRACT

Research indicated that COVID-19 pandemic's prevalence increases susceptibility to mental health issues among people of various demographics. For instance, in addition to the intellectual, psychological, and financial difficulties associated with entering universities, the pandemic is a further source of anxiety for university students in the Philippines. The number of students seeking counseling has increased since the pandemic started in March 2020, and this trend has persisted when educational institutions switched from online/virtual learning to in-person sessions. This study sought to determine the relationship between stress and life satisfaction among 295 university business students and how counselors could continue to support them. University students reported moderate levels of stress throughout the epidemic, but statistical analysis of their responses to online questionnaires about perceived stress and life satisfaction found that, despite this, they are still satisfied with their lives. This feeling of satisfaction is related to several issues that were tackled during the focus groups discussion. However, there was a significant negative relationship between the variables. The level of respondents' life satisfaction can decrease in direct proportion to an increase in their perceived stress. The study's implications, limitations, and recommendations for counseling program development and further research are likewise presented.

Keywords: perceived stress, life satisfaction, university students, post pandemic

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Transitioning to university life is presumably one of the expected changes in a person's academic life. It is when students unquestionably encounter difficulties and experiences that are both thrilling and difficult. Although students frequently thrive and adapt well to their new surroundings, the experience of being a university student is therefore harder for some than it is for others, as is to be expected. As a result, examining the social, academic, and personal adjustment of students as they enter colleges and universities has always been a topic of interest in social science research.

### *Perceived stress*

Although stress is a natural reaction to life events and serves as a stimulant to act, it may be damaging when it becomes regular and the individual is unable to handle it (Leka, *et al.*, 2004). This issue is related to the interplay of several elements, and the university stage is not exempt from it. Indeed, independent of personal or

societal factors, there are several academic reasons that are highly connected with stress (Misrachi-Launert *et al.*, 2015). Stress should be researched as an essential effect on the educational process since it can affect both the professional training process and its completion (Suárez-Monte *et al.*, 2015). The duties, roles, as well as educational and personal contexts of each student should be evaluated in this reflective examination, as these variables may exacerbate the process of developing the capacity to handle stress. Students, throughout their university years, encounter numerous obstacles, both internal and external to their education.

Perceived stress refers to an individual's opinions of how stressed they are at certain points in their lives. It includes sentiments about one's life's unpredictability and uncontrollability, how frequently the individual faces problems or challenges, the changes that are happening in life, and confidence in oneself to deal with these concerns effectively. According to research, university life is the leading source of stress for one-quarter (25%) of those aged 19 to 24. Academic/grade concerns, ambiguity about future, financial troubles, family matters, interactions with opposite sex, and interpersonal relationships can all be sources of stress for university students.

Although there had been studies on the pervasiveness of academic stress (Dymecka *et al.*, 2021), most of them have been conducted on students from other countries (Yang and Zhang, 2022; Rofiah, *et al.*, 2023,). As a result, this research helps provide an understanding of how this phenomenon affects university students in the Philippines, particularly business students during the COVID-19 epidemic and create strategies to mitigate any issues resulting from the shift in the educational instructions. This information allowed educational institutions to realize that stress is a relevant variable to advance in the understanding of how the pandemic influences people's life satisfaction in general, specifically among university students.

As the pandemic brings about uncertainty and frightening news, it was typical to hear of how much other individuals become prone to fear and anxiety. Students now need online counseling more than ever, which has led to the conclusion that this is a crucial time to offer these services. Parents, policymakers, and educational institutions would benefit from a better knowledge of how the pandemic's perceived stress affected students' lives and how that understanding affected the satisfaction they feel with their lives.

### ***Life satisfaction***

According to Shin and Johnson (1978), life satisfaction is the assessment of one's life based on subjective standards. It has been characterized by Raphael, *et al.* (1996) as an evaluation of one's existence including the family and learning aspects.

The pandemic has affected physical, mental, and psychological health in a similar way to that of other viral diseases. A person's life satisfaction, which is their subjective evaluation of their life, might be impacted by an outbreak of an infectious disease (Diener *et al.*, 1985). Numerous prior studies have shown that experiencing difficult life conditions has a negative impact on one's mental health (McGee, *et al.*, 2018) and the epidemic affects happiness and quality of life (Dymecka, *et al.*, 2021; Gawrych, *et al.*, 2021; Krok, *et al.*, 2021). Both Harper *et al.* (2020) and a Turkish

study (Satici, *et al.*, 2020) indicated that anxiety of COVID-19 affects people's well-being and lowers life satisfaction.

However, the subject of stress and life satisfaction of university students is an area that is not discussed often. Studies conducted were usually about well-being and workplace stress during the COVID-19 pandemic were mainly focused on teachers, health, and social care workers (Bou-Hamad *et al.*, 2021; De Kock *et al.*, 2021; Duncan and Smart, 2021; Vera San Juan *et al.*, 2021) and the general public (Ahmed, *et al.*, 2020; Gawrych, Gawrych, Cichoń & Kiejna, 2020; Marotta, Pesce & Guazzini, 2020; Ruggieri, Ingoglia, Bonfanti & Lo, 2021;) This research, which focused on business students, attempted to fill such gap.

### ***Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction***

Hui and Ramzan (2017) found a significant negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction, along with Weinstein and Laverghetta (2009) who discovered that life satisfaction among university students is often affected by university stress. Stress was found to decrease the coping skills of students, and this may lead to burnout and increased vulnerability to mental health concerns. These would then lead to physical problems and were found to contribute to lower levels of life satisfaction.

Research in this area demonstrates a significant relationship between the two variables. Ning and Tung *et al.* (2014) examined the level of perceived stress, resilience, and quality of life among students and evaluated if resilience was associated with stress level. The research revealed that increased stress levels and low levels of resilience often result in unsatisfactory quality of life and overall health. Another study concluded that when students are not satisfied with their life in the university, it is often due to their stressful experiences and personality style (Agro *et al.* 2013). Meanwhile, Alleyne *et al.* (2010) discovered that lower levels of stress and higher resilience scores suggested that increase of resilience and decrease of stress lead to greater life satisfaction since participants feel comforted when they are equipped with qualities and resources for coping with the challenges of life.

The transition to university is one major life event that puts people at a higher risk of emotional issues. Inquimbert *et al.* (2017) and Saleh, Camart, and Romo (2017) concluded that going to college could be a main source of stress among young people. Alleyne and Greenside (2010) revealed that the main causes of low levels of life satisfaction among students were their current environment, university amenities, and stress. Finding out how university students in the Philippines about their life, the stress that comes with it, and whether they are still satisfied despite the unusual circumstances presented during the pandemic was the main objective of this study.

This research sought to respond to the following questions in particular:

1. How were the University participants described in terms of their:
  - a. age
  - b. gender
  - c. perceived stress

d. life satisfaction

2. Is there a relationship between age, gender, perceived stress and life satisfaction?
3. What are the recommendations of the research results in the discipline of Guidance and Counseling?

### ***Significance of study***

The study's findings will benefit the following: from a theoretical standpoint, the findings indicated the variable associated with students' life satisfaction. It is possible to better understand the relationship between the factors: family communication, perceived stress, resilience, and life satisfaction. In practice, the findings may assist university counselors in developing comprehensive views of young adults' life satisfaction and preventative measures for newly enrolled students, particularly those with lower levels of life satisfaction. Furthermore, the findings will give additional information regarding its impact on students. It will help students understand that a decline in life happiness might impact other aspects of their lives.

## **2. RESEARCH METHOD**

A descriptive-correlation research design was used for the analysis of data. The variables, including perceived stress and life satisfaction of university business students were compared using this to establish correlations between them.

Three components of an online questionnaire that was partly altered from the versions used internationally were given to the respondents to complete. The researcher also emailed the instrument's creators to request their approval. The first part consisted of the Perceived Stress Scale, which was created in 1983 and is now used frequently to analyze how different situations affect our perceptions of stress. This scale asks questions about the feelings and ideas from the previous month. Each question has a 4-point scale. The scale has an acceptable internal consistency level ( $\alpha = .92$ ). In addition, the questionnaire also included Life Satisfaction Scale (SWLS) which was modified by Diener in 1985. It has five questions and three outcomes: 1, 4, or 7. ("absolutely disagree," "neither agree nor disagree," and "totally agree"). The scale has a reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.87. More satisfied lives are connected to higher SWLS scores. The researcher also constructed a self-report survey about the students' profile indicating their year level, gender, and degree program/major.

The survey for the research was conducted online using Google forms, with 298 undergraduate students enrolled during the second semester of the academic year 2021-2022 acting as respondents. Most respondents were in their second and fourth years at university. The survey was open from January through May of 2022. During this time, all students were reminded to complete the survey. The purpose of this study was summarized in the questionnaire's introductory section. Before answering the survey, students were asked to express their agreement and were assured that their participation was fully optional and that they may withdraw from the research at any time. Students were also informed that strict confidentiality would be observed all through the research.

### 3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

#### 3.1. Year level distribution of participants

**Table 1. Descriptive statistics**

<b>YEAR LEVEL</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
1 <sup>ST</sup> YEAR	1	0.34
2 <sup>ND</sup> YEAR	61	20.68
3 <sup>RD</sup> YEAR	1	0.34
4 <sup>TH</sup> YEAR	232	78.64
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 1 listed the various year levels that the participants fall under. Graduating students (Seniors) were made up majority of the volunteer respondents, followed by sophomores. The junior and freshman students had the smallest number of participants in this study.

#### 3.2. Degree program distribution of participants

**Table 2. Descriptive statistics**

<b>Degree program</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
MARKETING MANAGEMENT	245	83.05
ACCOUNTANCY & ACCOUNTING TECHNOLOGY	48	16.27
HOTEL & TOURISM MANAGEMENT	1	0.34
FINANCIAL MANAGEMENT	1	0.34
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>100 %</b>

Table 2 described the departments under the College of Business and Accountancy: (1) Accountancy and Accounting Technology; (2) Economics and Entrepreneurship; (3) Financial Management; (4) Hotel and Tourism Management; and (5) Marketing Management. Most students who submitted responses were from Marketing Management, which also happens to be one of the largest departments in the college. There were also respondents from the department of Accountancy and Accounting Technology.

#### 3.3 Gender distribution of participants

**Table 3. Descriptive statistics**

<b>GENDER</b>	<b>N</b>	<b>PERCENT</b>
FEMALE	208	70.51
LGBTQ	17	5.76
MALE	66	22.37
PREFER NOT TO SAY	4	1.36
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>295</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table 3 showed the frequency of each gender. The majority was made up of

female students, making up 71% of the respondents. Male students came in second (22%), followed by students from the LGBTQ community (6%). The 4 remaining respondents opted not to indicate their gender.

### 3.4 Perceived Stress

**Table 4. Descriptive statistics**

	N	Mean	Description	
Perceived_Stress1	295	2.62	Fairly Often	
Perceived_Stress2	295	2.62	Fairly Often	
Perceived_Stress3	295	3.32	Fairly Often	
Perceived_Stress4	295	1.58	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress5	295	1.85	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress6	295	2.37	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress7	295	1.79	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress8	295	2.27	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress9	295	2.41	Sometimes	
Perceived_Stress10	295	2.52	Fairly Often	
Overall Mean		<b>2.34</b>	Sometimes	Moderate stress

Table 4 showed that the overall mean of perceived stress suggested that the participants were under moderate stress at the time of the study. This was comparable to the findings of Malik and Javed (2021), who reported that university students in Oman suffered relatively moderate stress throughout the pandemic due to the support provided by educational institutions and their families. In addition, students knew that during the pandemic, educators were more tolerant and liberal in terms of requirement submission and class participation. However, this does not necessarily imply that they were careless with their academic obligations. They were just more comfortable because they could complete their work or listen to recorded lectures whenever it is most convenient for them. Furthermore, the findings of this study can be explained further by Reyna *et al.* (2020), who performed research on 1499 Argentinian respondents aged 18 to 78. This study looked at the influence of educational attainment on the effects of a pandemic on stress. They discovered that individuals with primary or no education had higher levels of stress than those with university education, owing to the concept that people with higher educational levels had more access to skills and resources for coping with uncertainty and stress.

### 3.5 Descriptive statistics for Satisfaction with Life

**Table 5. Descriptive statistics**

	N	Mean	Description	
Satis_Life_Scale1	295	4.45	Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Satis_Life_Scale2	295	4.55	Slightly Agree	
Satis_Life_Scale3	295	4.85	Slightly Agree	

Satis_Life_Scale4	295	4.55	Slightly Agree	
Satis_Life_Scale5	295	4.16	Neither Agree nor Disagree	
Overall Mean		<b>4.51</b>	Slightly Agree	Slightly satisfied

Despite the epidemic, respondents were still marginally content with their lives in general, according to Table 5. The participants admitted that there had been struggles financially, psychologically, and emotionally, but they were grateful that they were living with their families at the time the pandemic occurred. This supports the findings of a study conducted on the Portuguese and Brazilian populations by Passos, Prazeres, and Teixeira (2020), sociodemographic variables such as being a student, having higher educational levels, and living with family members were significantly associated with higher levels of life satisfaction scores. This provided stability and a continuous source of contact with parents and other family members. This finding supported the study of Levin (2012), which revealed that the quality of family communication had a bigger influence on teenage life satisfaction than family structure or financial resources. Furthermore, parental communication may have an indirect effect on teenage life satisfaction.

Because social support and interaction are well known to be crucial for adaptive functioning, it is possible that opportunities for interpersonal interaction during the pandemic could disrupt social support networks at the wrong time (Brooks *et al.*, 2020). However, support coming from one's family can influence the attitude toward pandemic. It is also during these periods when family support could help in fostering positive mental health and coping strategies against the stresses brought about by the pandemic. This is also in line with the research findings of Li and Xu (2020) and Cao *et al.* (2020) who also concluded that staying with parents helps lessen anxiety. Furthermore, they discovered that during the pandemic, social support is inversely related to anxiety symptoms among university students.

### 3.6 The relationship of Age, Gender, Perceived Stress and Life Satisfaction

**Table 6. Multivariate regression**

Model Fit Measures						
Model	R	R <sup>2</sup>	Overall Model Test			
			F	df1	df2	p
1	0.437	0.191	13.6	5	289	< .001

Model Coefficients - Life Satisfaction Scale				
Predictor	Estimate	SE	t	p
Intercept <sup>a</sup>	6.2169	1.6145	3.851	< .001
Perceived Stress Scale PREFER NOT TO SAY:	-1.0592	0.1306	-8.108	< .001

1 – 0	-0.4286	0.5711	-0.751	0.454
FEMALE:				
1 – 0	-0.0633	0.1551	-0.408	0.683
LGBT:				
1 – 0	-0.223	0.299	-0.746	0.456
AGE	0.0425	0.0789	0.539	0.59

<sup>a</sup> Represents reference level

This study used multivariate linear regression to predict Life Satisfaction based on Perceived Stress, Age and Sex. The Regression Analysis revealed that the model significantly predicted Life Satisfaction based on Perceived Stress ( $F(5, 289) = 13.6$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,  $R^2 = 0.191$ ). Life Satisfaction decreases for each increase in Perceived Stress. This implied that the independent variable (Perceived Stress) manifested a significant negative effect to the dependent variable (Life Satisfaction).

Because all study participants were university students living at home with their families, there was very little age variation among them. This accounted for the lack of data on gender and age that might be used to evaluate if these factors had a clear impact on life satisfaction. The results were in line with earlier studies (Zhang and Ma, 2020; Jovanovic *et al.*, 2016; Yang *et al.*, 2016; Bibi *et al.*, 2015; Kong *et al.*, 2014, Baltaci, 2013; Kamal, *et al.*, 2013), which showed that while women may report higher levels of life satisfaction, the difference was not large enough to make a difference or an influence. In addition, research showed that having children, being married, or one's age had no significant effect on life satisfaction (Hawryluck, Gold, Robinson, *et al.*, 2004).

This study's main goal was to determine if there were any statistically significant relationships between the variables perceived stress and life happiness among business students after the COVID-19 pandemic. The associations were empirically supported, and university students were found to perceive stress positively or negatively based on their emotional capabilities and surroundings. Generally, the findings revealed that stress is negatively connected to life satisfaction. These findings were consistent with those of other research that discovered adaptability to the university context is influenced by life satisfaction and life satisfaction is often predicted by perceived stress, appearance, and daily events in the life of students.

It is crucial to emphasize, however, that despite the risks involved with the pandemic, students remain confident in their capacity to ward off illness or, if infection does arise, to treat it effectively. During the pandemic, students had experienced stress, but they had more time to focus on other aspects in their lives such as rest and relaxation, mental health, entrepreneurial activities (online selling) and nurturing their relationships with their families. As a result, it is believed that individuals were able to control their fear of COVID-19 better. They were less prone to suffer from the negative effects of a pandemic, such as depression or worry, and the stress they experience may not lead to suffering. Participants believed that their lives are rewarding despite their terrible circumstances.

This is also plausible since the university students who participated in the study were between the ages of 20 and 24, when they feel they can more easily adjust to difficult life conditions such as the pandemic. Some of the participants have stated that they have dealt with the situation in some way and are continuing to live their lives and earn a living. Individuals have noticed that the pandemic accorded them with opportunities to earn a living (Qomariyah, *et al.*, 2022). During the focus group discussion, some of them acknowledged that they were already engaged in entrepreneurial efforts such as online selling to financially support their families. They no longer feel utterly powerless in the face of dangers, making the pandemic appear less threatening and more manageable. "Hindi na puwedeng yung takot sa Covid ang laging maghari sa buhay namin (*We cannot allow fear of the pandemic to rule over our lives anymore*)" one participant remarked.

#### 4. CONCLUSION

When the pandemic began, people had to adjust to new living conditions, which may have prompted some to be concerned about how the epidemiological scenario would proceed. A pandemic often increases worry, which can lead to excessive stress, which is damaging to our health. Furthermore, when the economy collapsed as the coronavirus spread, many families found it impossible to focus on anything other than survival. Even wealthy families, however, found it challenging to establish the ideal learning environment because, in many cases, parents who worked from home with many children struggled to locate a physical space and a time for everyone to be online. Students missed socializing with their classmates and participating in extracurricular activities.

Because preserving students' mental, emotional, and physical well-being is at the center of what they do, university counselors have typically been at the heart of the problem-solving process. They also referred vulnerable students to mental health professionals and provided emotional support to teachers, administrators, and other counselors. Finding strategies to continue leading students intellectually, emphasizing their emotional and social development, and giving targeted help to students experiencing diverse personal and academic obstacles were all accomplished while focusing on these other objectives. Further research found that a perceived lack of information such as new instructions regarding prevention frequently caused stress during the pandemic (Torales, Higgins, Maia, & Ventriglio, 2020; Caleo, Duncombe, Jephcott, & Lokuge, *et al.* 2018; Mayer, Tooher, Collins, Street, & Marshall, 2013). For this reason, Shim and Lee (2023) also proposed that counseling and dissemination of factual information to students would be useful in supporting students' adjustment during and after the epidemic.

After two years of the epidemic, university business students learned a range of coping strategies. According to participants in the online focus group discussion, social ties, such as family and group chats, were very useful throughout the epidemic. Even if they weren't physically present for others as frequently as they would have wanted, modest gestures such as online greetings or "kumustahan" provided them with the impression that they still had friends who knew what they were going through. The small but continuous presence of family members and friends from their

schools, neighborhoods, and churches signaled that better things were on the way as the limitations/ restrictions were eased.

Counselors must thus consider the critical roles that significant others play in students' development and their ability to lead satisfying lives. This can be accomplished by keeping in constant contact with students and their families through in-person or online counseling, as well as by making a greater effort to involve students in orientation, conferences, recollections, outreach and extension programs, intramurals, faith-based organizations, and homeroom guidance sessions at university and college levels in the Philippines, where in-person classes are gradually being offered. During the academic year, counselors might also plan events and counseling sessions to promote resilience, coping mechanisms, and mental health awareness. Furthermore, students can join special interest groups that are often run by their peers to enhance their interests while also improving their well-being.

## **5. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Finally, the study's limitations must be mentioned, including (a) the small sample size and (b) the limitations of instruments. This meant that more study with higher variability in the areas of gender, year level, course major and stress and life satisfaction levels before and after the pandemic is required to facilitate generalization of the findings and conclusions.

Furthermore, this study was done on a limited number of undergraduate business students, and this does not represent the larger community. Convenience sampling also involved using social media to recruit study participants. Because it lacks the power to discover socio-demographic group differences, such a sample limits the sorts of statistical studies that may be undertaken. Follow-up research employing population-based sampling is thus required to evaluate the proposed mediation model and any group differences.

In addition, because the data is cross-sectional, the present study cannot establish cause and effect relationships, even though there is a substantial negative correlation between the variables. Longitudinal studies are required to confirm if the hypothesized direction of effect is correct. Other factors that may influence these variables include maturity, personality, IQ, coping techniques, socioeconomic status, university atmosphere, and so on. To successfully aid persons struggling with the psychological repercussions of the pandemic, it is critical to consider their own resources and work to strengthen these resources.

The instruments employed for similar research are frequently constructed within foreign contexts. Although comparable questionnaires have been used in other studies, if this research is ever reproduced, it may be especially important for the Philippines to construct local versions of stress and life satisfaction scales. Counselors and educators face a more difficult field of social science research to investigate to better understand the influence of these two factors on other aspects of life.

Despite these limitations, the study enabled the researcher to conclude that stress serves as a reaction to many important shifts in life, acting as an agent in the

process of adjusting to various life scenarios. However, it has been shown that stress is damaging when a certain circumstance is experienced more often, and the individual doesn't have enough resources and capacity to cope with it.

The pragmatic consequences of this paper are pertinent to analyzing the occurrence of stress among university students during and after the pandemic. The significance of this study's findings is if reproduced, might serve as recommendations for implementing stress-management approaches in the university environment. Personal, emotional, and social skills should be considered while developing instruments and resources since they have a stronger influence on university students' life satisfaction and academic achievement.

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