

# Exploring the Role of Resilience in Mitigating Stress and Enhancing Mental Health among University Students

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## Abstract:

The study aimed to explore the role of resilience in mitigating stress and enhancing mental health among university students. The sample comprised 98 university students aged between 25-35, enrolled in diverse undergraduate, post-graduate, and PhD courses from various districts of Kashmir. The instruments utilized for assessing perceived stress, resilience, and mental health were the 10-item Perceived Stress Scale developed by Cohen et al. (1993), the 6-item Resilience Scale by Smith et al. (2008), and the 12-item General Mental Health Questionnaire developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The findings revealed a significant negative correlation between perceived stress and brief resilience, as well as a strong negative correlation between perceived stress and mental health. Additionally, a moderate positive correlation was observed between brief resilience and mental health. Gender differences were assessed for all three variables, although females are on the slightly higher end in terms of mean differences with respect to perceived stress and brief resilience, but the differences are small to be called statistically significant.

**Keywords:** Perceived Stress, Brief Resilience, Mental Health, University Students

## Introduction:

Concerns have been raised regarding the growing need for student mental health services due to the growing number of young people enrolling in universities. Mental health holds immense importance and can be defined as positive self-perception, a sense of dignity and physical well-being, intellectual, emotional, and spiritual growth, and interpersonal harmony (Bhugra, et al 2013). There are a lot of things that jeopardize mental health and amongst them stress is one of the major variables endangering mental health; in daily life, people encounter a variety of social, cognitive, and physiological stressors to varied degrees (Kogler, et al 2015).

While people intentionally manage their stress, they don't always select the best course of action and don't approach their issues in the same way (Bonnno, 2008); put differently, different people approach problems and stress in different ways (Gheshlagh, 2016 et al). People can adjust to their circumstances and preserve their mental health by employing positive coping mechanisms; on the other hand, negative coping mechanisms can exacerbate stress (Vashmehsara, 2015).

University students today face a multitude of challenges as a result of the intense and constant competition in the market. Many social and emotional obstacles in college/university life have an impact on students' psychological and mental health. Students go through a transitional stage when they start university, moving from adolescence to adulthood. Students go through a lot of changes in their lives at this stage, which is characterized by a persistent concern about growing proficient, achieving a goal, battling for autonomy, and attempting to adjust to a changing environment. Higher levels of academic stress and psychological distress are common among university students, which leads to a high number of students quitting school before finishing their desired courses (Andrew et al., 2008). Resilience has gained traction and recognition as a framework to examine the differences between students who thrive in the university environment and those who find it difficult to cope with the growing body of research in positive psychology (Pidgeon, Rowe, Stapleton, Magyar, & Lo, 2013; Seligman, Ernst, Gillham, Reivich, & Linkins, 2009; Stallman, 2010). Good stress management will enable people to better meet their needs and overcome obstacles in their lives (become compatible) amongst which resilience is the key factor in coping with hazardous life circumstances.

The adaptive behavior of people under severe stress is the focus of resilience, a relatively new concept in research. The ability of a person to overcome hardships and effectively adjust to their environments is commonly referred to as resilience. Commonly used definitions and instruments assessing resilience factors such as emotional intelligence and tenacity are included in the term (Ahern, 2006). According to Bonanno (2008), resilience is returning to and maintaining one's innate ability to cope with stress. Expanding upon the stress-diathesis model, Masten et al, (1990) define resilience as the successful adaptation process, capacity, or outcome in difficult circumstances. This definition highlights protective factors in the interaction between an individual and their environment.

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According to experts, resilience consists of three elements: 1. Psychological resilience, or the capacity to tolerate stress under pressure in stressful situations or in the face of mental illness (sturgeon & Zautra, 2013). Stated differently, psychological resilience is associated with psychological tolerance, which lowers the likelihood of mental illnesses (Min et al, 2013). 2. Emotional resilience, the ability to withstand challenging affective and emotional situations to lessen internal conflict is known as emotional resilience. Those with high emotional resilience would manage their emotional discomfort in trying times rather than taking an emotion-focused stance (Rajan, 2014). 3. Social resilience, which demonstrates steadiness and resistance to negative social influences and hazards like destitution, dysfunctional families, and interpersonal conflicts. In this manner, a person would embrace practical remedies and a cooperative mindset to manage social stress and change the circumstance to something better (Keck & Sakdapolrak, 2013).

Given the established effects of stress on mental health and well-being, resilience—which is measured by traits like temperament and problem-solving abilities—becomes especially important in the demanding university environment. Given the demanding nature of university life, it becomes essential to comprehend how students manage stressors (Hartley, 2011).

Research is required to determine whether resilience and mental health are more closely related for certain students as they adjust to the social and emotional demands of the university life, as well as to investigate the usefulness of a resilience framework in university health (Hartley, 2011).

### **Literature Review**

Resilience is regarded as a protective factor that works in concert with stressors to lessen the probability of unfavorable consequences. Positive social and personal well-being, improved mental health, and adjusting to university life are all linked to resilience. McGillivray and Pidgeon (2015) investigated the characteristics of resilient university students. The study involved 89 university students in total, ages ranging from 18 to 57. The findings demonstrated that, in comparison to university students reporting low levels of resilience, those with high levels of resilience reported significantly lower levels of psychological distress and significantly higher levels of mindfulness. It broadens our understanding of resilience and helps us understand that universities should create programs that help students become more resilient. By doing so, they lower the likelihood that students will experience mental health issues and are better equipped to handle the demands of their studies.

Hamdan et al, (2014) conducted a study to explore Correlates of Resilience among University Students and they found 50% of university students reported being moderately to highly resilient, 70% reported feeling somewhat depressed, and roughly 50% reported feeling that they had a lot of support from friends, family, and other social networks. The results also indicated that resilience was significantly predicted by depression and perceived friend-social support. They conclude that mental health practitioners must improve university-aged individuals perceived social support system and resilience. Mental health practitioners are required to screen students for risk behaviors and psychosocial health indicators, such as resilience, depressive symptoms, sources of perceived social support, and lifestyles, as part of their periodic assessment.

Resilience benefits students' mental health and wellness and is positively correlated with academic engagement and achievement. Research was done by Turner et al in 2017, to find out what factors lead to high or low levels of student resilience, measure the resilience of students studying in the built environment, and investigate the connection between wellbeing and resilience. Four hundred and forty-one Melbourne, Australia, undergraduate students provided survey data. According to the findings, students performed best on creating networks, maintaining their health, cooperating with others, and leading authentic lives, and least well on maintaining perspective, out of the six resilience components. Student resilience has been found to be influenced by experience, university policy, and the interactions between the home, work, and university environments. The findings also showed that student wellbeing is predicated on resilience.

By promoting resilience, universities can actively support the well-being of their students. Resilience-building techniques can be incorporated into learning activities, assessment tasks, and course structures. Universities have the power to establish rules and guidelines, provide tools and resources, and foster a climate of learning that encourages the development of resilience in students.

Hartley in 2013, investigated the Relationship of Resilience to Academic Persistence in Students with Mental Health Issues. This study looked into the relationships between academic perseverance and mental health in college students dealing with mental health issues, as well as intrapersonal and interpersonal resilience. The sample consisted of 121 undergraduates who were selected from the mental health offices of two midwestern universities. Results demonstrated a strong statistical relationship between resilience factors and mental health, highlighting the critical role that intrapersonal resilience played, particularly in students who experienced high levels of psychological distress. These findings imply that, for college students who are struggling with mental health concerns, implementing a resilience framework may strengthen coping strategies and increase retention.

Pidgeon et al, (2014), explored the traits of university students who reported high and low resilience, with a primary focus on psychosocial variables that may be changed. 214 university students from Australia, the US, and Hong Kong participated in an international sample study where they answered questions about psychological distress, campus

connectivity, resilience, and perceived social support. The perceived social support, campus connectedness, and psychological distress were found to account for a significant portion (36%) of the variance between the high and low resilience groups of university students, according to the results of a one-way between groups multivariate analysis of variance. Higher levels of psychological distress and considerably lower perceptions of social support and campus connectedness were reported by university students with low resilience, in comparison to university students with high levels of resilience.

Wu et al, (2020) explored the relationship between resilience and mental health among higher education students and the findings showed that compared to junior-year students, first-year and senior-year students had higher negative mental health levels and lower positive mental health levels. Resilience was found to be a significant predictor of mental health status in the short term, specifically within the year between junior and senior year, according to analyses using cross-lagged structural equation modeling. However, over the long run—that is, during the two years between freshman and junior year—resilience's predictive role for mental health is not significant. Furthermore, both the short- and long-term significant predictive function of an individual's mental health for resilience has been fully validated. These findings suggest that depending on a student's year in college, mental health education and interventions could be customized.

According to Ahluwalia et al, (2022) Undergraduate students need resilience to manage life transitions and deal with stressors like new roommates, heavier workloads, and budgetary worries.

Akeman et al, (2020), evaluated the advantages of a quick resilience program for college freshers. Participants were first-year students at a private university in the Midwest. Goal setting, mindfulness, and resilience skills were all covered in the four-session program on resilience. Using linear mixed models, time-by-treatment interactions were investigated at the end of the semester and post-training. A matched comparison sample and 252 students who completed resilience programming were included in the analysis. Improvements in perceived stress were noted at both the semester's end and the post-training period, although resilience programming did not correlate with improvements in depression at the latter point. Increases in emotion control, and mindfulness, were observed. In conclusion, A quick, resilience-focused intervention could be implemented everywhere to help college students' mental health.

Bastaminia, et al, (2016), sought to ascertain the connection between mental health and resilience among the State University of Yasuj students in 2015. To take part in this cross-sectional study, 338 students in total were chosen at random. On the subscales measuring social dysfunction and depression, the students' scores were highest and lowest, respectively. Significant inverse correlations were found between all general health subscales and resilience. The findings indicate that resilience has a major impact on overall health. In summary, heightened resilience has the potential to mitigate symptoms of somatization, anxiety, social dysfunction, and depression. As a result, we can draw the conclusion that teaching university students' resilience skills can improve their mental and somatization health.

Haddadi and Besharat, (2010) conducted a study to explore the relationship between a sample of students' mental health and resilience, as well as indices of vulnerability such as psychological distress, depression, and anxiety. In this study, 214 people (97 boys and 114 girls) participated. The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ), Beck Depression Inventory (BDI), Beck Anxiety Inventory (BAI), Mental Health Inventory (MHI), and Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (CD-RISC) were all completed by the participants. Resilience was found to be negatively correlated with psychological distress, depression, and anxiety and positively correlated with psychological well-being. Different levels of resilience through self-esteem, personal competence and tenacity, tolerance of negative affect, control, and spirituality influence psychological health and vulnerability indices.

In order to investigate the relationship between resilience and mental health, Rudwan, and Alhashimia, (2018), take a descriptive approach, taking into account a number of variables within a sample of 1,000 University of Nisswa students (403 men and 597 women), chosen through random sampling. Research questions were addressed using statistical analyses, such as regression analysis, one-way ANOVA test, t-test, Pearson correlation coefficient, and LSD test. The findings show a favorable relationship between resilience and mental health, with notable gender differences favoring female students in these domains. There were no age-related differences observed. The study emphasizes the significant influence of resilience on mental health.

Yue, and Fangli, (2018), observed the relationship between college students' resilience, mental health, and stressful events. 320 undergraduate students were polled via questionnaires and the findings reveal there is a strong positive correlation between resilience and mental health, and resilience may be used to positively predict mental health. There is also a strong positive correlation between resilience and stress events, and stress events and mental health are significantly positively correlated the study concludes that there is a strong relationship between the mental health of college students, their resilience, and stressful events. Increasing college students' resilience can help them feel less negatively impacted by stressful events and improve their mental health.

#### **Objectives of the study:**

- To assess resilience among university students.
- To assess perceived stress among university students.

- To assess mental health among university students.
- To examine the relationship between understudy constructs.
- To assess the understudy constructs with respect to gender.

### Methodology:

This study employed a quantitative methodology aligned with its objectives. Utilizing random sampling, it involved 98 university students aged 20-35, enrolled in diverse undergraduate, post-graduate, and PhD courses from various districts of Kashmir. Data, predominantly collected online, was obtained through a combination of online and offline modes.

### Research instruments:

The survey employed a questionnaire comprising two segments. The first segment gathered demographic information from participants, while the subsequent part focused on evaluating resilience, perceived stress, and mental health. Perceived stress among university students was assessed using Cohen et al.'s (1983) 10-item Perceived Stress Scale. Resilience among university students was measured through a brief 6-item Resilience Scale developed by Smith et al. (2008). Furthermore, mental health was evaluated using a General Health Questionnaire consisting of 12 items, as developed by Goldberg and Williams (1988). The instrument's structure aimed to comprehensively capture various facets of the respondents' psychological well-being.

### Data Analysis:

The collected questionnaire data underwent quantitative quantification through a predefined procedure. Subsequently, SPSS version 26 software was utilized for data analysis. Descriptive statistics, including frequencies, mean, and standard deviation, were computed. Bivariate correlation was applied to discern relationships among variables, and the t-test was employed to identify differences with respect to gender across variables. This systematic analytical approach aimed to derive meaningful insights from the gathered data.

### Results:

Demographics	Groups	Frequency	%Age	Total
Gender	Male	34	34.7	98
	female	64	65.3	
Age	20-25	54	55.1	98
	25-30	38	38.8	
	30-35	6	6.1	
Qualification	UG	27	27.6	98
	PG	59	60.2	
	PHD	12	12.2	
Residence	Rural	58	59.2	98
	Urban	40	40.80	
Family	Nuclear	63	64.3	98
	Joint	35	35.7	

The above table illustrates that among the 98 participants, the majority fall within the 20-25 age bracket, constituting 55.1%, followed by those aged 25-30 at 38.8%, and participants aged 30-35 at 6.1%. In terms of gender distribution, female participants constitute the larger percentage at 65.3%, while male participants make up 34.7%. In the context of residence, a higher proportion of participants hail from rural areas at 59.2%, compared to 40.8% from urban areas. Qualification-wise, the majority hold a postgraduate degree (60.2%), followed by undergraduate (27.6%) and Ph.D. (12.2%). Family structure shows a prevalence of nuclear families (64.3%) over joint families (35.7%). This breakdown offers a comprehensive overview of the demographic composition of the study participants.

Table below shows the mean and standard deviation of perceived stress, brief resilience and mental health for males and females.

	Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
<b>Perceived stress</b>	Male	34	2.01	.83
	Female	64	2.31	.66
<b>Brief resilience</b>	Male	34	2.55	.72
	Female	64	2.82	.66
<b>Mental health</b>	Male	34	1.34	.56
	Female	64	1.48	.59

This table presents the mean and standard deviation of perceived stress, brief resilience, and mental health for male and female participants. For perceived stress, females (M = 2.31, SD = 0.66) reported higher levels compared to males (M = 2.01, SD = 0.83). In terms of brief resilience, females (M = 2.82, SD = 0.66) also exhibited higher levels than males (M = 2.55, SD = 0.72). Regarding mental health, females (M = 1.48, SD = 0.59) again showed slightly higher scores than males (M = 1.34, SD = 0.56).

Table below shows the mean and standard deviation of Perceived Stress, Brief Resilience and Mental Health.

Variables	n	M	SD
1. Perceived stress	98	2.20	.73
2. Brief resilience	98	2.73	.69
3. Mental health	98	1.43	.58

### Correlational analysis

The table below shows the inter-correlation between perceived stress, brief resilience, and mental health.

	1	2	3
<b>Perceived stress</b>	.		
<b>Brief resilience</b>	-.31**	.	
<b>Mental health</b>	-.71**	.51	.

Note: \*\*. correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2-tailed).

There is a significant negative correlation between perceived stress and brief resilience ( $r = -.31, p < .01$ ), as well as a strong negative correlation between perceived stress and mental health ( $r = -.71, p < .01$ ). Additionally, there is a moderate positive correlation between brief resilience and mental health ( $r = .13, p > .05$ ).

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**Table below showing mean difference for male and female.**

	t	Sig.	Mean differences	95% confidence interval of the difference	
				lower	Upper
<b>Perceived stress</b>	-1.96	.05	-.30	-.60	.00
<b>Brief resilience</b>	-1.83	.07	-.26	-.55	.02
<b>Mental health</b>	-1.18	.24	-.15	-.39	.10

This table displays the results of independent samples t-tests for mean differences between males and females in perceived stress, brief resilience, and mental health. For perceived stress, the mean difference is slightly significant ( $t = -1.96, p = .05$ ), with females (mean difference = -0.30) reporting slightly higher levels than males. For brief resilience ( $t = -1.83, p = .07$ ) females also reported slightly higher level of resilience but these differences are not conventionally significant. And for mental health ( $t = -1.18, p = .24$ ) difference is also not statistically significant at conventional levels, suggesting no significant gender differences in these domains.

**Conclusion:**

In conclusion, this paper sheds light on the crucial role of resilience in mitigating stress and enhancing mental health among university students. The growing concerns about the mental health of students in the face of academic and life challenges are addressed, emphasizing the importance of understanding, and fostering resilience. The literature review provides a comprehensive overview of existing research, highlighting the positive impact of resilience on mental well-being, academic engagement, and overall adjustment to university life.

The study's objectives, meticulously outlined in the methodology, are aligned with the broader aim of assessing and understanding resilience, perceived stress, and mental health among university students. The results offer valuable insights into the demographic composition of the participants and reveal gender-related variations in perceived stress. Moreover, the inter-correlation and t-test analyses contribute to a nuanced understanding of the relationships between perceived stress, brief resilience, and mental health, while also exploring potential gender differences.

The findings of this research contribute to the existing body of knowledge on the subject, aligning with previous studies that emphasize the positive impact of resilience on mental health. Importantly, the study advocates for the incorporation of resilience-building techniques into university programs to actively support students' well-being.

In the broader context, the paper underscores the need for universities to adopt initiative-taking measures to enhance students' resilience, thereby promoting their mental health and overall success. By acknowledging and addressing the challenges posed by the demanding university environment, institutions can create a more supportive and resilient student

community. This research provides a valuable foundation for future studies and interventions aimed at fostering resilience and improving mental health outcomes among university students.

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