

Impact of Perceived Academic Stress on Academic Performance and Coping Mechanisms among University Students

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Academic stress (AS) is a distressing state that could arise when academic demands surpass an individual's capacity to adapt during exams, tutorials, and practical sessions. This can vary by individual and significantly affect their performance. Different coping mechanisms may help the students to overcome the perceived stress. This cross-sectional study was conducted at the University of Peradeniya, Sri Lanka which provides a unique academic environment. The sample represented the proportion of students across all faculties. The data were collected through an online questionnaire and the AS was evaluated through academic stress scale (PAS). The analysis was performed with IBM SPSS version 25. Among the 506 respondents, majority were female (60.3%, n=305). Overall, a high academic stress was observed (mean PAS score = 54.5), particularly among female students and those followed the Veterinary Medicine and Animal Science. No marked differences in stress levels were noted between students in health-related and non-health-related courses. Notably, students with higher GPAs reported lower stress levels. Headache was reported as the main associated symptom (66.6%) followed by sleep disturbances (55.7%). The most common coping strategies were talking to family or friends (73.9%), engaging in leisure activities like listening to music (69.8%) and watching online content (61.7%). The study highlights the variability of AS across gender, the study programs, and the academic performance. The most common coping strategies included seeking social support. Thus, fostering a supportive social environment could be beneficial in managing students' stress effectively.

Keywords: Academic Stress, Perceived Academic Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Academic Performance, Social Support