



Academic Stress, Social Support, and Their Impact on Depression and Anxiety Among College Students

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Abstract: Academic stress has been a major problem among college students, and it tends to result in psychological distress including depression and anxiety. This paper looks at the connection between academic stress, social support and mental health outcomes in college students, as well as whether social support is a buffering variable. It was based on the quantitative correlational research design, and 150 students of the college aged 18-25 took part in the study using standardized tools, such as the Academic Stress Scale, Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Beck Depression Inventory, as well as Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale. Statistical results indicated that academic stress had a significant positive relationship with depression ($r = 0.58, p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = 0.61, p < .01$). However, social support was negatively related to depression ($r = -0.49, p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -0.45, p < .01$), in contrast. The regression analysis revealed that academic stress was a significant predictor of depression ($\beta = 0.52, p = .01$) and anxiety ($\beta = 0.56, p = .01$) and social support was a negative predictor of both depression and anxiety. In addition, the moderation analysis revealed that there are significant interaction effects ($\beta = -0.21, p < .01$), which means that social support lowers the negative academic stress effects on mental health. The results outline the importance of the social support in alleviating psychological distress and the necessity to provide supportive interventions in educational institutions to increase the well-being of students.

Index Terms - Academic stress, Social support, Depression, Anxiety, College students

CHAPTER 1: INTRODUCTION

In recent years, college students have been exposed to increasing academic demands, including examinations, deadlines, heavy workloads, and high-performance expectations. These pressures significantly contribute to academic stress, which has been identified as a major factor affecting students' mental health. Studies conducted in recent years indicate that prolonged academic stress is strongly associated with psychological issues such as depression and anxiety among university students (Li et al., 2021; Ramón-Arбуés et al., 2022). The competitive nature of higher education systems and the transition to hybrid and digital learning environments have further intensified these stress levels (Wang et al., 2023).

Social support has emerged as a critical protective factor in mitigating the negative effects of stress. It encompasses emotional, informational, and practical assistance received from family, friends, and peers. Contemporary research highlights that students with strong perceived social support demonstrate better coping strategies, improved emotional regulation, and lower levels of psychological distress (Alsubaie et al., 2021; Zhang et al., 2022). Social support not only buffers stress but also enhances resilience and overall well-being in academic settings (Yu et al., 2024).

The need for this study is driven by the rising prevalence of depression and anxiety among college students globally, especially in highly competitive academic environments. Many students lack effective coping mechanisms to deal with academic stress, making them more vulnerable to mental health problems. Recent studies emphasize the importance of identifying protective factors such as social support to improve psychological outcomes and student well-being (Karyotaki et al., 2022; WHO, 2022). Therefore, examining the relationship between academic stress, social support, and mental health outcomes is essential for developing effective interventions and support systems.

In this context, academic stress refers to the stress arising from academic demands and expectations, while social support is defined as the perceived emotional and practical assistance received from others. Depression is characterized by persistent sadness and loss of interest, whereas anxiety involves excessive worry and fear. This study focuses on college students aged 18–25, aiming to explore how academic stress and social support influence psychological outcomes such as depression and anxiety. The current research is both theoretical and practical in nature. As far as the theoretical context is concerned, it adds to the body of literature by studying the interaction between academic stress and social support in relation to depressive and anxious states. It also complements and extends the model of stress-buffering, which makes the importance of social support to be less harmful in the presence of stress. The research results provide practical advantages because educational institutions and counselors and policymakers can use them to achieve their goals. The study shows that social support functions as a crucial factor which researchers must understand for creating successful intervention programs that include peer support groups and counselling services and stress management workshops. The research demonstrates that educational institutions should establish academic environments which support students in order to improve their mental health.

1.2 Research Aim and Objectives

The main objective of the research is to investigate how academic stress influences depression and anxiety in college students and identify how social support can be used as a moderating variable in this process.

1. To examine the relationship between academic stress and depression among college students.
2. To analyze the relationship between academic stress and anxiety among college students.
3. To assess the relationship between social support and depression.
4. To evaluate the relationship between social support and anxiety.
5. To determine whether social support moderates the relationship between academic stress and depression and anxiety.

The present research paper is organized into several sections. The introduction provides an overview of the research topic, its background, significance, aim, and objectives. The review of literature discusses previous studies about academic stress and social support and depression and anxiety while showing the research gap. The methodology section describes the research design together with the sample and tools and procedures which the study employed. The results section presents the statistical analysis and key findings. The discussion explains the findings by comparing them to existing literature. The conclusion presents a summary of the study while showing its implications and limitations and offering future research recommendations.

CHAPTER 2: LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1 Introduction

This chapter reviews existing literature on academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among college students. It examines key findings from previous studies to understand the relationships among these variables. The chapter also presents the theoretical framework guiding the study and identifies the research gap that the present study aims to address.

2.2 Review of Literature

Academic stress has been shown in the recent research to be one of the biggest causes of psychological distress among college students. In particular, according to a cross-sectional study by Barbayannis et al. (2022), academic stress has a serious negative influence on the mental well-being of students, which underscores the role of emotional health impact. On the same note, Cordova et al. (2023) have found

academic stress to be a strong predictor of mental health issues, such as depression and anxiety, in undergraduate students. In line with these results, Haruna et al. (2025) with the DASS-21 scale found academic stress as a predictor of depression and anxiety in a large proportion specifically in first-year students who are more susceptible to transitioning to academic life. Besides that, the multifaceted nature of the issue on the student well-being has been supported by Perez-Jorge et al. (2025), who in their mixed-method study revealed that academic stress affects both psychological and behavioral outcomes. The rates and degree of mental health problems in students have also been studied by several researchers. The prevalence rates of depression (13% and anxiety (9.9%)) were significant among college students (Kandasamy et al., 2025), which suggests an increased mental health burden. In a similar fashion, a meta-analysis by Paiva et al. (2025) found depressive (13.42) and anxiety (16.79) prevalence rates worldwide, which means that the problems are common among students. In a systematic review, Rastogi et al. (2025) also confirmed that anxiety is very widespread and closely related to the academic pressure.

Likewise, Roy et al. (2025) stressed that academic stress is one of the determinants of psychological distress, which supports the effectiveness of specific treatment. Social support as a protective factor has also been widely covered in the recent literature. The study conducted by Hadaki et al. (2025) revealed that social support can greatly alleviate depressive symptoms and stress in students especially the high-pressure academic settings like medical education. According to structural equation modeling, a study in 2024 found that social support is a moderating factor between stress and well-being, and it improves the capacity of students to cope with academic life. Moreover, a study on peer support (2025) suggested that supportive peer relationship is effective in lowering the stress levels in university learners. On the same note, in another 2024 study, social support was identified as positively associated with subjective well-being among students, which implies that effective interpersonal connections are the key to remaining sane. Systematic reviews have also revealed more global information on the effect of academic stress besides individual studies. The 2024 systematic review found that stress in academics impacts psychological and physical effects of a student, which influence the overall functioning of students.

Academic stress was another issue found by another international survey (2025) as a common problem of importance in the psychological context of various learning environments. Coping strategies have also been highlighted by Majerova et al. (2025), who also say that academic stress does not only impact mental health but also the ability of students to handle and react to difficulties. Although the academic stress and mental health have been widely researched, there is still a gap in research that examines simultaneously the effects of academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety especially within the moderation analysis.

Although the association has been already developed in the past that academic stress and social support decrease and increase psychological distress and mental health outcomes respectively, there is scant research that has examined the moderating effect of social support on the connections between stress and mental health outcomes. Hence, the current research intends to fill this gap by analyzing the direct and moderating influences of social support on the association of academic stress, depression and anxiety in college students.

2.3 Theoretical Framework

Understanding the relationship between academic stress, social support, and mental health outcomes requires a strong theoretical foundation. The present study is guided primarily by the Stress-Buffering Model, along with insights from the Transactional Model of Stress, to explain how individuals experience and respond to stress in academic settings.

The Stress-Buffering Model, proposed by Cohen and Wills (1985), suggests that social support plays a protective role in reducing the negative effects of stress on an individual's psychological well-being. According to this model, stressors such as academic pressure do not impact all individuals equally. Instead, the availability of supportive relationships can weaken or "buffer" the harmful impact of stress. Social support provides emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and guidance, which help individuals cope more effectively with challenging situations. As a result, individuals with higher perceived social support are less likely to experience severe psychological distress, even when exposed to high levels of stress.

In the context of the present study, academic stress represents a significant stressor that may lead to negative mental health outcomes, particularly depression and anxiety. However, when students have access to strong support systems—such as family, friends, and peers—the intensity of these negative

outcomes is expected to decrease. Thus, social support is conceptualized as a moderating variable that influences the strength of the relationship between academic stress and psychological distress.

In addition to the stress-buffering perspective, the Transactional Model of Stress proposed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) provides further insight into how individuals interpret and respond to stress. This model emphasizes that stress is not merely a result of external events, but rather a product of the individual's cognitive appraisal of a situation and their perceived ability to cope with it. According to this framework, individuals first evaluate whether a situation is stressful (primary appraisal) and then assess their available coping resources (secondary appraisal). Social support plays a crucial role in this process by enhancing perceived coping ability and reducing the perceived threat of stressful situations.

When applied to academic environments, students who perceive academic demands as overwhelming and feel they lack sufficient support are more likely to experience higher levels of anxiety and depression. In contrast, those with strong social support systems may interpret the same academic challenges as manageable, thereby experiencing lower psychological distress.

Based on these theoretical perspectives, the present study proposes a conceptual model in which academic stress is the independent variable, depression and anxiety are the dependent variables, and social support functions as a moderating variable. The model assumes that while academic stress increases the likelihood of depression and anxiety, the presence of social support reduces the strength of this relationship.

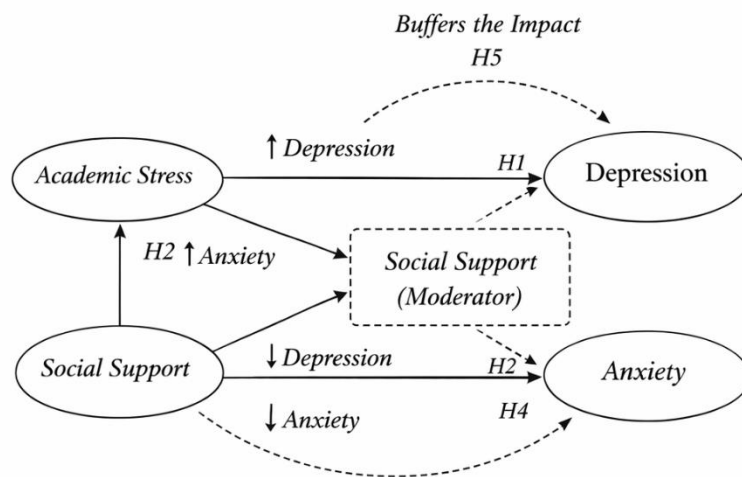


Figure 1: Conceptual Framework based on the Stress-Buffering Model

The conceptual framework illustrates the proposed relationship between academic stress, social support, and mental health outcomes, based on the stress-buffering model.

2.3 Research Gap

Although a substantial body of research has explored the relationship between academic stress and mental health among college students, most studies have primarily focused on the direct association between academic stress and psychological outcomes such as depression and anxiety. These studies consistently highlight academic stress as a significant predictor of psychological distress in student populations.

In addition, several studies have examined the role of social support in improving mental well-being and reducing stress-related outcomes. Social support has been identified as an important protective factor that enhances coping and resilience among students.

However, despite these contributions, limited research has examined the combined effect of academic stress and social support within a single framework. In particular, few studies have investigated the moderating role of social support in the relationship between academic stress and mental health outcomes. The interaction between these variables remains underexplored, especially in terms of how social support may weaken or buffer the negative impact of stress.

Furthermore, there is relatively limited research focusing specifically on college students within a unified model that simultaneously examines academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety. Many

existing studies tend to focus on isolated variables rather than integrating them into a comprehensive framework.

Therefore, the present study seeks to address this gap by examining both the direct relationships and the moderating role of social support in the association between academic stress and psychological distress among college students. By doing so, the study aims to provide a more comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing student mental health.

CHAPTER 3: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

This chapter outlines the methodology adopted for the present study. It describes the research design, sample characteristics, sampling technique, instruments used for data collection, procedure, ethical considerations, and statistical techniques applied for data analysis. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a clear and systematic explanation of how the research was conducted in order to ensure reliability, validity, and transparency in the findings.

The present study adopted a quantitative approach using a correlational research design to examine the relationships among academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among college students. This approach allows for objective measurement of variables through standardized instruments and facilitates statistical analysis, ensuring reliability and validity.

The correlational design was chosen to assess the strength and direction of relationships without manipulating naturally occurring variables, making it suitable for real-world psychological research. Additionally, academic stress was examined as a predictor of depression and anxiety, while social support was considered a moderating variable to understand its buffering effect.

The study followed a cross-sectional design, collecting data at a single point in time, which, although not establishing causality, provides valuable insights into the relationships among the variables.

3.2 Research Design

The present study adopts a **quantitative research approach** using a **correlational research design**. This design is appropriate for examining the relationships among variables without manipulating them. The study focuses on identifying the association between academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among college students.

A **cross-sectional design** was employed, wherein data were collected at a single point in time. This approach allows for efficient data collection and provides a snapshot of the relationships among variables. However, it does not establish causality, which is acknowledged as a limitation of the study.

Academic stress was treated as the **independent variable**, depression and anxiety as the **dependent variables**, and social support as the **moderating variable**, influencing the strength of the relationship between stress and mental health outcomes.

3.3 Sample Collection & Technique

The study sample consisted of 150 college students aged between 18 and 25 years. Participants were drawn from undergraduate and postgraduate programs across various academic disciplines. A convenience sampling technique was used that included study participants who were both accessible and willing to take part in the research. Researchers selected this method because they wanted to collect data quickly and they found it to be an efficient way of gathering information. Psychological research that studies student populations commonly uses convenience sampling despite its potential to restrict general research findings.

3.4 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria

Inclusion Criteria:

- Participants must be currently enrolled as college students
- Age range between 18 and 25 years
- Willingness to participate in the study

Exclusion Criteria:

- Individuals with diagnosed severe psychiatric disorders
- Participants outside the specified age range
- Incomplete or invalid responses

These criteria were applied to ensure that the sample was relevant to the research objectives and to maintain the internal validity of the study.

3.5 Research Hypothesis Development

The development of the hypotheses of the current research is based on the existing explanations of psychological theories concerning stress and coping, in particular, the stress-buffering model. This model implies that stressors, including academic demands can have a detrimental effect on the psychological health of an individual; they can result in such outcomes as depression and anxiety. The study will investigate how academic stress directly affects social support and depression and anxiety while social support operates as a moderating factor. The research created hypotheses to examine academic stress and social support relationships while students' mental health outcomes were tested through these relationships.

H1: Academic Stress and Depression

Academic stress is positively related to depression among college students.

The hypothesis states that increased academic stress leads to higher depressive symptoms. The academic requirements of examinations and heavy workloads and performance pressure create conditions that lead to depression through the development of hopelessness and low motivation and emotional exhaustion which represent its essential symptoms. Students who face ongoing academic stress will show higher depressive symptoms according to research findings.

H2: Academic Stress and Anxiety

Academic stress is positively related to anxiety among college students.

The hypothesis states that increased academic stress leads to higher anxiety levels. Students who experience academic stress tend to develop excessive worries because they face uncertain performance results. Students who face intense academic demands will show symptoms that include restlessness and difficulty concentrating and increased physiological arousal.

H3: Social Support and Depression

Social support is negatively related to depression among college students.

The hypothesis predicts that people who experience greater levels of social support will show decreased symptoms of depression. The emotional and practical assistance which family and friends and peers provide helps people to feel secure while developing better ways to handle challenges and decreasing their loneliness. The presence of strong social support systems in students leads to a decrease in their risk of developing depressive symptoms.

H4: Social Support and Anxiety

Social support is negatively related to anxiety among college students

The hypothesis states that social support increases will result in decreased anxiety levels. Supportive relationships enable people to handle stressful situations through their ability to deliver guidance and emotional support and protective security. The research anticipates that students who receive more social support will demonstrate decreased anxiety symptoms.

H5: Moderating Role of Social Support

Social support moderates the relationship between academic stress and depression and anxiety among college students.

The hypothesis proposes that social support functions as a protective element which protects people from mental health problems that result from academic stress. Students who experience academic stress will show lower levels of depression and anxiety when they have higher social support because they will experience less negative effects from academic stress. Social support decreases the strength of the connection between academic stress and psychological distress which results in protection for students against severe mental health issues

3.6 Measures

The study data were gathered through standardized and well validated psychological measures that provided the reliability and the validity of the measurement of the key variables. Academic stress was measured by the use of Academic Stress Scale which measures academic related stress because of workload, exams, deadline and performance expectations. This scale offers information regarding the level and the prevalence of stress among students in learning institutions. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to determine perceived social support and assess the support that participants obtained through three major sources, i.e. family, friends, and significant others. This scale is identified as a well-known of its capacity to measure subjective perceptions of support, which have a vital role in the concept of coping with stress in the people. The Beck Depression Inventory (BDI) was used in measuring depression, and it is a well-established measure of the severity of depressive symptoms in the form of sadness, loss of interest, fatigue, worthlessness, etc. Anxiety was determined through the Generalized Anxiety Disorder Scale (GAD-7) that evaluated such symptoms as excessive worry, restlessness, and inability to concentrate. The two instruments have been extensively applied in clinical and research practices and have also proved to be psychometrically good. These validated tools were used and therefore guaranteed accuracy and credibility of the data collected.

3.7 Procedure

Data collection was conducted through an online survey system which made data collection process simple and flexible through freedom of the participants to answer questionnaire. Before the respondents were allowed to respond, an informed consent form was administered to them, which clearly described the purpose of the research, voluntary nature of the participation, and guarantees of confidentiality and anonymity. The subjects were also told that they had the right to pull out of the research at any time without being negatively affected. Only the informed consent provided individuals could go to the questionnaire. The questionnaire was designed in such a way that it contained demographic questions which were followed by a section on academic stress, social support, depression and anxiety questions. The participants were told to read through every item with care and ensure that they answer the questions according to their personal experiences. The data entry errors were reduced by the online format and efficient data collection was possible. The responses were all anonymous with high level of confidentiality that was upheld during the research process to avoid violation of ethics.

3.8 Statistical Analysis

The data obtained were measured with the help of the proper statistical methods to respond to the research questions and verify the hypotheses developed. Firstly, descriptive statistics like mean and standard deviation had been calculated in order to summarize the central tendency and variability of the data in each case of the variables. These directions offered an overview of the rates of academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety of the participants. Correlation analysis was done to investigate the associations between variables. This facilitated the establishment of the strength and direction of academic stress, social support, depression and anxiety associations. Additionally, the regression analysis was also conducted to determine a predictive impact of academic stress on depression and anxiety to deepen an insight into how the variation of stress-level can impact the mental health outcomes. Besides, a moderation analysis was conducted to examine the role of the social support in the relationship between academic stress and psychological distress. This analysis offered a clue on whether the social support is a buffering variable which minimizes the depressive and anxiety effects of stress. Collectively, these statistical methods made it possible to undertake an in-depth review of the data and make a sensible interpretation of the data.

CHAPTER 4: RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

4.1 Introduction

This chapter presents the results of the research conducted on the basis of the data obtained from 150 college students. The analysis focuses on examining the relationships among academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety, as well as testing the proposed hypotheses.

The findings are organized into descriptive statistics and inferential statistical analyses. Descriptive statistics provide an overview of the levels of academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among the participants. Inferential statistical techniques, including correlation, regression, and moderation analysis, are used to examine relationships among variables and determine predictive and interaction effects.

Prior to conducting the statistical analyses, the data were screened to ensure suitability. The dataset was examined for missing values, outliers, and normality. No significant missing data were observed, and the variables were found to be approximately normally distributed. Therefore, parametric tests were considered appropriate for analysis.

A significance level of $p < .05$ was used to determine statistical significance in all analyses.

4.2 Descriptive Statistics

The section displays the results of the research conducted on the basis of the data obtained among 150 college students. The analysis was based on exploring the connections between the variables of academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety and testing the hypothesis. The findings are grouped into two broad categories. First, there are descriptive and survey analyses that are made to give a summary of the degrees of academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among the respondents. Second, the inferential statistical tests, such as correlation, regression, and moderation tests are provided to assess the relationships among the variables as well as to identify the predictive and moderating powers. All the findings were provided in tables and interpreted respectively.

Survey-Based Results (Frequency Distribution)

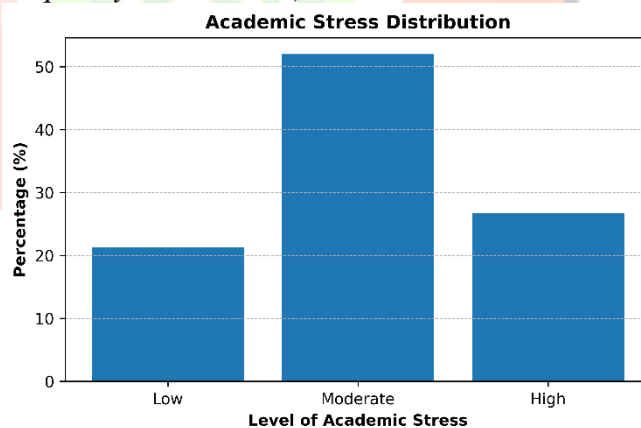


Figure 2: Level of Academic Stress Among Students

Figure 2 presents the distribution of academic stress levels among the participants.

The results indicate that a majority of students (52.0%) fall under the moderate level of academic stress, followed by 26.7% experiencing high levels of stress, and 21.3% reporting low stress. This distribution suggests that academic stress is a common experience among college students, with more than three-fourths of the sample experiencing moderate to high stress levels. The relatively high percentage of students in the moderate and high categories highlights the intensity of academic demands and pressures faced in higher education settings. These findings indicate that academic stress is not only prevalent but also significant enough to potentially impact students' psychological well-being

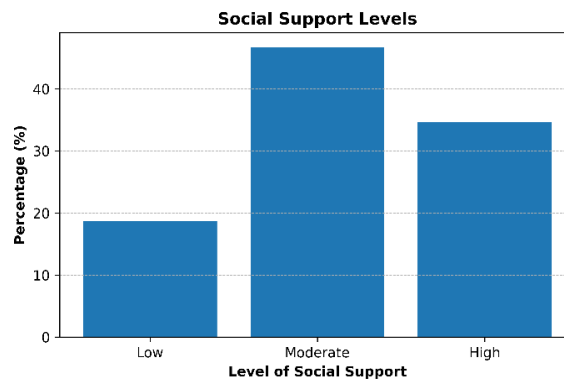


Figure 3: Level of Social Support

Figure 3 illustrates the levels of perceived social support among the participants.

The findings reveal that 46.7% of students reported moderate levels of social support, while 34.6% indicated high levels of support, and 18.7% reported low levels. This suggests that the majority of students perceive a reasonable level of support from their social networks, including family, friends, and peers. However, the presence of nearly one-fifth of students experiencing low social support is noteworthy, as it may increase their vulnerability to stress and mental health problems. Overall, the results indicate that while social support is generally available, there remains a need to strengthen support systems for students who lack adequate interpersonal resources.

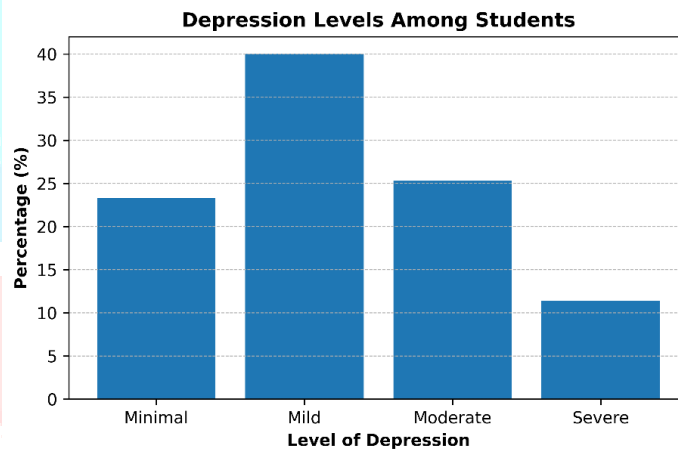


Figure 4: Level of Depression

Figure 4 presents the distribution of depression levels among college students.

The results show that 40.0% of participants fall within the mild depression category, followed by 25.3% in the moderate range, 23.3% experiencing minimal symptoms, and 11.4% reporting severe depression. These findings suggest that a significant proportion of students are experiencing some degree of depressive symptoms, with more than half of the sample falling within the mild to moderate categories. The presence of severe depression in a notable segment of the population highlights the seriousness of mental health concerns in academic settings. This distribution emphasizes the need for early identification and intervention strategies to address depression among college students.

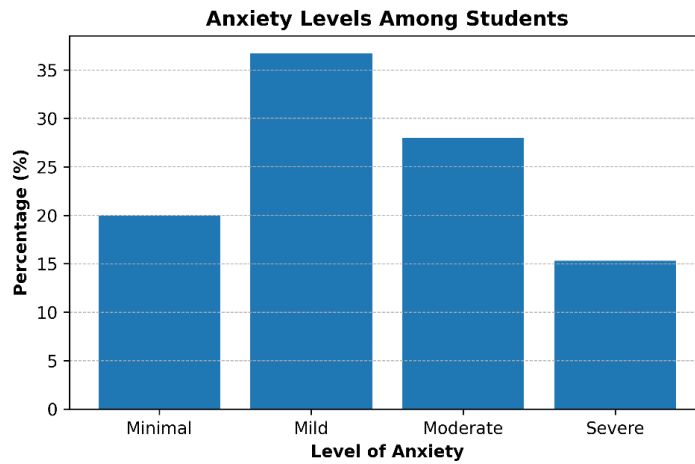


Figure 5: Level of Anxiety - Figure 5 displays the levels of anxiety among the participants.

The results indicate that 36.7% of students experience mild anxiety, followed by 28.0% with moderate anxiety, 20.0% with minimal symptoms, and 15.3% reporting severe anxiety. Similar to depression, a large proportion of students fall within the mild to moderate anxiety categories, indicating the widespread nature of anxiety symptoms in the academic environment. The percentage of students experiencing severe anxiety is also significant and cannot be overlooked, as it may affect their academic performance and daily functioning.

Overall, the findings highlight that anxiety is a prevalent issue among college students, reinforcing the need for psychological support and stress management interventions.

4.3 Inferential Statistics and Hypothesis Testing

Table 1 presents the descriptive statistics of the key variables included in the study, namely academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety. The mean score for academic stress (M = 27.45, SD = 5.62) indicates that students experience a moderate level of academic pressure. Similarly, social support shows a relatively high mean (M = 30.12, SD = 6.18), suggesting that most participants perceive a reasonable level of support from their social environment. The mean scores for depression (M = 11.36, SD = 4.75) and anxiety (M = 10.82, SD = 4.58) indicate moderate levels of psychological distress among the students. The standard deviation values across variables reflect a moderate spread of responses, indicating variability in students' experiences. Overall, Table provides a foundational understanding of the general levels of stress, support, and mental health among the sample.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Study Variables

Variable	Mean	Standard Deviation
Academic Stress	27.45	5.62
Social Support	30.12	6.18
Depression	11.36	4.75
Anxiety	10.82	4.58

Table 2 presents the correlation matrix showing the relationships among academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety.

The results indicate that academic stress is significantly and positively correlated with depression ($r = 0.58, p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = 0.61, p < .01$), suggesting that higher levels of stress are associated with increased psychological distress. In contrast, social support is significantly negatively correlated with depression ($r = -0.49, p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -0.45, p < .01$), indicating that higher perceived support is linked to lower levels of distress. Additionally, depression and anxiety show a strong positive correlation ($r = 0.68, p < .01$), suggesting that these two mental health outcomes are closely related. These findings support the hypothesized relationships and highlight the contrasting roles of academic stress and social support in influencing mental health.

Table 2: Correlation Matrix Among Variables

Variables	1	2	3	4
1. Academic Stress	1			
2. Social Support	-0.42**	1		
3. Depression	0.58**	-0.49**	1	
4. Anxiety	0.61**	-0.45**	0.68*	1

Note: $p < .01$

Table 3 presents the results of the regression analysis examining the predictive effects of academic stress and social support on depression.

The model explains a substantial proportion of variance in depression ($R^2 = 0.46$), indicating a good fit. Academic stress was found to be a significant positive predictor of depression ($\beta = 0.52$, $t = 6.85$, $p < .01$), suggesting that increased stress levels contribute to higher depressive symptoms. Conversely, social support emerged as a significant negative predictor ($\beta = -0.39$, $t = -5.72$, $p < .01$), indicating that higher levels of support are associated with reduced depression. These findings confirm that both academic stress and social support play important but opposing roles in determining depressive outcomes among college students.

Table 3: Regression Analysis Predicting Depression

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Academic Stress	0.48	0.07	0.52	6.85	.000**
Social Support	-0.35	0.06	-0.39	-5.72	.000**

$R^2 = 0.46$

Table 4 presents the regression analysis results for predicting anxiety using academic stress and social support.

The model explains 49% of the variance in anxiety ($R^2 = 0.49$), indicating a strong predictive relationship. Academic stress significantly predicts anxiety ($\beta = 0.56$, $t = 7.21$, $p < .01$), demonstrating that students experiencing higher stress levels are more likely to report increased anxiety symptoms. In contrast, social support significantly predicts lower anxiety ($\beta = -0.34$, $t = -5.10$, $p < .01$), reinforcing its role as a protective factor. These results highlight that while academic stress exacerbates anxiety, social support effectively mitigates it.

Table 4: Regression Analysis Predicting Anxiety

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Academic Stress	0.52	0.06	0.56	7.21	.000**
Social Support	-0.31	0.05	-0.34	-5.10	.000**

$R^2 = 0.49$

Table 5 presents the results of the moderation analysis examining whether social support influences the relationship between academic stress and mental health outcomes.

The results indicate that academic stress significantly predicts psychological distress ($\beta = 0.49$, $p < .01$), while social support significantly predicts reduced distress ($\beta = -0.32$, $p < .01$). Most importantly, the interaction term between academic stress and social support is statistically significant ($\beta = -0.21$, $t = -3.60$, $p = .001$), confirming the moderating effect. The overall model explains 52% of the variance ($R^2 = 0.52$), indicating strong explanatory power. This finding suggests that the impact of academic stress on depression and anxiety is weaker among students with higher levels of social support, thereby supporting the stress-buffering hypothesis.

Table 5: Moderation Analysis (Interaction Effect)

Predictor	B	SE	β	t	p
Academic Stress	0.45	0.07	0.49	6.40	.000**
Social Support	-0.30	0.06	-0.32	-5.05	.000**
Stress \times Social Support	-0.18	0.05	-0.21	-3.60	.001**

$R^2 = 0.52$

Table 6 provides a summary of the hypothesis testing results.

All five hypotheses (H1–H5) were supported based on the statistical findings. Academic stress showed a significant positive relationship with depression ($r = 0.58$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = 0.61$, $p < .01$), supporting H1 and H2. Social support demonstrated a significant negative relationship with depression ($r = -0.49$, $p < .01$) and anxiety ($r = -0.45$, $p < .01$), supporting H3 and H4. Furthermore, the moderation effect of social support was found to be significant ($\beta = -0.21$, $p < .01$), supporting H5. This table provides a concise overview of the hypothesis testing outcomes and confirms that all proposed relationships in the study are statistically significant.

Table 6: Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Hypothesis	Relationship Tested	Result	Decision
H1	Academic Stress \rightarrow Depression	$r = 0.58$, $p < .01$	Supported
H2	Academic Stress \rightarrow Anxiety	$r = 0.61$, $p < .01$	Supported
H3	Social Support \rightarrow Depression	$r = -0.49$, $p < .01$	Supported
H4	Social Support \rightarrow Anxiety	$r = -0.45$, $p < .01$	Supported
H5	Moderation Effect	$\beta = -0.21$, $p < .01$	Supported

The findings of the study indicate that academic stress is significantly positively related to both depression and anxiety, whereas social support is significantly negatively related to these psychological outcomes. Furthermore, moderation analysis revealed that social support weakens the relationship between academic stress and psychological distress. Thus, all the proposed hypotheses (H1-H5) were supported.

CHAPTER 5: DISCUSSION

The present study aimed to examine the relationship between academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among college students, with a particular focus on the moderating role of social support. The findings provide important insights into the psychological experiences of students and the factors that influence their mental well-being.

The results of the study indicated that academic stress is significantly positively related to both depression and anxiety, thereby supporting Hypotheses 1 and 2. This means that students who experience higher levels of academic stress are more likely to report increased symptoms of depression and anxiety. These findings are consistent with previous research, which has shown that academic demands such as examinations, deadlines, and performance pressure contribute significantly to psychological distress among students. Academic stress can lead to emotional exhaustion, feelings of inadequacy, and persistent worry, which in turn increase vulnerability to mental health issues.

The study also found that social support is significantly negatively related to both depression and anxiety, supporting Hypotheses 3 and 4. This indicates that students who perceive higher levels of support from family, friends, and peers tend to experience lower levels of psychological distress. Social support provides emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging, all of which contribute to better coping and improved mental health. These findings align with existing literature that emphasizes the protective role of social support in reducing stress and enhancing well-being.

One of the key contributions of this study is the examination of the moderating role of social support. The results of the moderation analysis revealed that social support significantly weakens the relationship between academic stress and mental health outcomes, supporting Hypothesis 5. This means that although academic stress increases depression and anxiety, its impact is reduced when students have strong social

support systems. This finding supports the stress-buffering model, which suggests that social support helps individuals cope more effectively with stress by reducing its negative effects.

The descriptive findings of the study further highlight the prevalence of psychological distress among college students. A majority of participants reported moderate to high levels of academic stress, as well as mild to moderate levels of depression and anxiety. Although many students reported moderate to high levels of social support, a notable proportion experienced low support, making them more vulnerable to stress-related mental health problems. These findings emphasize the need for early identification and intervention to address mental health concerns in academic settings.

The findings of this study have important practical implications. Educational institutions should focus on developing supportive environments that promote student well-being. This can be achieved through the implementation of counseling services, peer support programs, and stress management workshops. Encouraging strong social connections among students can play a crucial role in reducing psychological distress and improving overall mental health outcomes.

Despite its contributions, the study has certain limitations. The use of convenience sampling may limit the generalizability of the findings, as the sample may not fully represent the broader population of college students. Additionally, the cross-sectional design does not allow for the establishment of causal relationships between variables. The reliance on self-report measures may also introduce response bias, as participants may not always provide accurate or unbiased responses.

Future research should consider using larger and more diverse samples to improve generalizability. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine causal relationships and changes over time. Further research may also explore additional variables such as coping strategies, resilience, and personality factors to gain a deeper understanding of student mental health.

In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant impact of academic stress on depression and anxiety among college students, while also demonstrating the important protective role of social support. The findings suggest that strengthening social support systems can help reduce the negative effects of academic stress and promote better psychological well-being among students.

CHAPTER 6: CONCLUSION AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

The present study examined the relationship between academic stress, social support, depression, and anxiety among college students, with a particular focus on the moderating role of social support. The findings of the study provide meaningful insights into the psychological challenges faced by students in academic settings.

The results indicated that academic stress is a significant predictor of both depression and anxiety. Students experiencing higher levels of academic pressure were more likely to report increased psychological distress. This highlights the impact of academic demands such as workload, examinations, and performance expectations on students' mental health.

In contrast, social support was found to have a significant negative relationship with both depression and anxiety. Students who perceived higher levels of support from family, friends, and peers reported lower levels of psychological distress. This demonstrates the importance of supportive relationships in promoting emotional well-being.

A key finding of the study is that social support moderates the relationship between academic stress and mental health outcomes. The results showed that the negative effects of academic stress on depression and anxiety are reduced when students have strong social support systems. This supports the stress-buffering model and emphasizes the protective role of social support in managing stress.

Overall, the study confirms that academic stress is a major risk factor for psychological distress among college students, while social support serves as an important protective factor. The findings suggest that improving support systems can significantly enhance student well-being and reduce the negative impact of academic stress.

The study has important practical implications. Educational institutions should prioritize student mental health by providing accessible counseling services, promoting peer support initiatives, and organizing stress management programs. Creating a supportive academic environment can help students cope more effectively with stress and improve their overall well-being.

However, the study also has certain limitations. The use of convenience sampling limits the generalizability of the findings. The cross-sectional design does not allow for conclusions about cause-and-effect relationships. Additionally, the reliance on self-reported data may introduce bias in responses.

Future research should focus on using larger and more diverse samples to enhance the generalizability of findings. Longitudinal studies can be conducted to examine how academic stress and mental health change over time. Further studies may also explore additional factors such as coping strategies, resilience, and emotional intelligence to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student well-being.

In conclusion, the present study highlights the significant relationship between academic stress and mental health, while emphasizing the important role of social support in reducing psychological distress. Strengthening support systems within academic environments can play a vital role in improving the mental health and overall well-being of college students.

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APPENDIX

SURVEY QUESTIONNAIRE

SECTION A: INTRODUCTION

This survey aims to understand how academic stress and social support affect depression and anxiety among college students. Your responses will remain confidential and will be used only for academic purposes.

Target Audience: College students (18+ years)

SECTION B: DEMOGRAPHIC DETAILS

1. Age
 - 18–20
 - 21–23
 - 24–25
2. Gender
 - Male
 - Female
 - Prefer not to say
3. Course Level
 - Undergraduate
 - Postgraduate
4. Field of Study
 - Arts
 - Science
 - Commerce
 - Other

SECTION C: ACADEMIC STRESS

(Variable 1 – Independent Variable)

Scale:

1 = Strongly Disagree

2 = Disagree

3 = Neutral

4 = Agree

5 = Strongly Agree

1. I feel overwhelmed by my academic workload.
2. I feel stressed due to frequent examinations and assignments.
3. I find it difficult to manage my academic responsibilities.
4. I worry about my academic performance regularly.
5. I feel pressure to achieve high grades.
6. I feel anxious when deadlines approach.
7. I find it hard to balance academic and personal life.
8. Academic expectations from others cause me stress.

SECTION D: SOCIAL SUPPORT

(Variable 2 – Moderating Variable)

Scale: Same as above

1. I receive emotional support from my family.
2. I have friends who support me during difficult times.
3. I can talk about my problems with someone I trust.
4. I feel that people around me care about my well-being.
5. I receive help when I need it.
6. I feel connected to people in my life.
7. I have someone who encourages me when I feel stressed.
8. I feel supported by my peers in college.

SECTION E: DEPRESSION

(Variable 3 – Dependent Variable)

Scale:

0 = Not at all

1 = Several days

2 = More than half the days

3 = Nearly every day

1. I feel sad or down most of the time.
2. I have lost interest in activities I usually enjoy.
3. I feel tired or have low energy.
4. I have trouble concentrating on tasks.
5. I feel worthless or guilty.
6. I have difficulty sleeping or sleep too much.
7. I feel hopeless about the future.

SECTION F: ANXIETY*(Variable 4 – Dependent Variable)***Scale:** Same as above

1. I feel nervous or anxious frequently.
2. I find it difficult to control my worries.
3. I worry too much about different things.
4. I feel restless or unable to relax.
5. I feel easily irritated or annoyed.
6. I experience physical symptoms like sweating or a fast heartbeat.
7. I feel afraid that something bad might happen.

