

## Stress Levels Amongst First Year and Final Year Female College Students

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### ABSTRACT

Stress nowadays impacts people from each age group, gender, living conditions, etc., and can manifest into health complications later on. For the majority of students, college is a stressful time because they are in an entirely new phase. The current study was aimed at evaluating the stress levels endured by female college students from the Ludhiana district in their first and final year. It was hypothesized that there is no significant variation between the stress levels of female college students in their initial and final year. The sample consisted of 120 female college students studying in Ludhiana (60 final year and 60 first year), collected through snowball sampling technique. Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale, a self-report instrument, was used to assess the degree of perceived stress. It was discovered that female college students in their final year were more stressed than those in their first year.

**Keywords:** *Academic Stress, Female College Students, Final and First-Year College Students*

Psychological stress is a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Stress is a non-specific response of the body to a demand (Selye, 1978).

Academic stress can be defined as a student's mental state resulted from constant social and self-imposed stress in the educational settings that drain the student's psychological resources. (Misra et. al. 2000). Students experience high stress due to various stressors. Stress may negatively impact one's health and academic performance if it is perceived negatively or when it occurs in excess. (Kaur & Kaur, 2015)

Common stresses among female college students consist of financial problems, test pressure, failing a test, being rejected by someone and relationship breakups (Garrett 2001). Depression that generally prevails in developing countries, due to adverse social conditions results in psychological distresses among female students (McKean et al., 2000).

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Much research has been done on stress, and a portion of it has been conducted on college students in order to consider what specific factors contribute to perceived stress. This type of research is important because increased understanding of this topic would be helpful in the development of new coping tactics, stress management skills, stress preventative programs, and in the training of future educators and counsellor. Even though this topic has been studied over the years, gaps of knowledge still exist that need to be looked into. (Garrett 2001)

Under these circumstances, it was felt, that a research should be carried out in Ludhiana district to compare stress levels of first year and final year female college students as well as identify some possible stressors.

### REVIEW OF LITERATURE

It was observed that students suffer more stress than the rest of the population but seldom seek help (Eweniyi, 2009). In both academic areas as well as in our society, stress has become an important topic. Extreme stress results in increased prevalence of psychological problems like depression, anxiety, substance abuse and suicide ideation (Bansal and Bhawe, 2006)

Academic stress is a mental distress related to some anticipated frustration from academic failure as well as awareness of such failure's probabilities.(Gupta & Khan, 1987)

It was reported that higher stress is found among first year and last year university students than students in middle years. It was due to the fact that major life transition from school to university creates stress among first year students and among last year students may be they have fears about life decisions after degree (Nelson et al., 1995)

Stress was the most prevalent health problem affecting academic achievement in undergraduate students (Dwyer & Cumming, 2001).

Some findings explain that females tend to stress more over college related events (Frazier & Schauben, 1994).

Various factors such as academic burden, highly competent peers, hindrances in reaching their desired specialty, and transition phase from being a school student to almost being a physician play an important role in affecting their psychological health. (Bayram, 2008).

#### *Objective*

1. To find out the stress levels among first year female college students of Ludhiana.
2. To find out the stress levels among final year female college students of Ludhiana.
3. To compare stress levels among first year female college students and final year female college students of Ludhiana.
4. To identify some possible stressors among the female college students of Ludhiana.

#### *Hypotheses*

Null hypothesis - There exists no difference in stress levels of first year and final year female college students of Ludhiana.

H1 - The stress level of final year female college students of Ludhiana is higher than first year female college students of Ludhiana.

## **METHODOLOGY**

### ***Research Design***

This comparative study was aimed at measuring the stress levels of first year and final year female college students of Ludhiana with usage of Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS).

### ***Sample***

Snowball sampling technique was used to collect data through Google forms. A total sample of 120 female college students from Ludhiana, with 60 of them being from first year and 60 from final year, pursuing a three-year undergraduate programme was taken from different colleges of Ludhiana.

### ***Inclusion criteria***

- Undergraduate female college students
- First year female college students
- Final year female college students
- Students attending regular college in Ludhiana

### ***Exclusion criteria***

- Postgraduate students
- Pre final and post freshman
- Students studying outside Ludhiana
- Male college students
- Students not attending regular college in Ludhiana

### ***Tools***

Perceived Stress Scale (Cohen et. al., 1983) is a 10 item self-reported questionnaire. It aims to assess how stressful one perceives particular life circumstances to be and is in the Likert scale format of 0 to 5 with options ranging from never to very often (0 = Never, 1 = Almost Never, 2 = Sometimes, 3 = Fairly Often, 4 = Very Often). The scores are obtained by reverse scoring the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and others as it is and then adding across all scale items for total raw score. Higher scores indicate higher levels of perceived stress. Scores ranging from 0-13 are considered low stress, 14-26 moderate stress and 27-40 scores are under category of high stress. The scores on the PSS-10 demonstrated adequate internal consistency reliability ( $\alpha = .78$ ); moderate concurrent criterion validity with the amount of stress experienced during an average week ( $r = .39, p < .001$ ) (Cohen & Williamson, 1988).

Another open ended question was added in order to find out some of the possible stressors of sample group in which options like future plans, finances, interpersonal relationships, academic pressure and others was given, from which respondents were asked to choose as best suited to them.

### ***Statistical Analysis***

To statistically analyse the data, computation of t test was calculated using JASP Version 0.17.1.

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### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

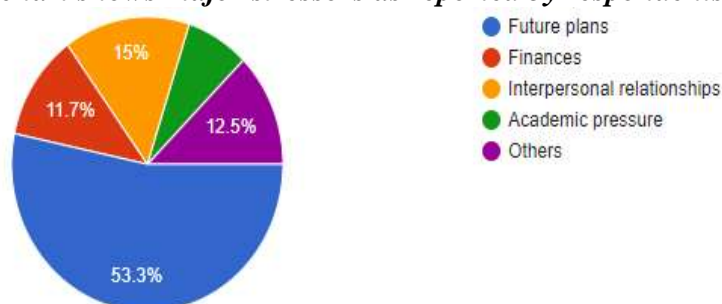
*Table 1 shows description of sample size*

Sr. No.	Particulars	N	Mean
1.	First Year	60	23.533
2.	Final Year	60	20.683

*Table 2 shows t test results*

	t	Df	p
Total	3.605	118	<.001

*The chart shows major stressors as reported by respondents*



The main aim was to compare the stress levels amongst first and final year female college students of Ludhiana. The raw scores were analysed using appropriate statistical analysis i.e. t-test which finds out the significant differences between means of groups on measured variables.

There was significant difference between the stress levels of first year and final year female college students. Final year female college students scored higher on Perceived stress ( $t = 3.605$ ,  $p < .001$ ) in comparison to first year female college students. Therefore, Null Hypothesis has been rejected and Hypothesis 1 has been accepted that states “The stress level of final year female college students of Ludhiana is higher than first year female college students of Ludhiana”.

Majorly students were stressed about their future plans (53.3%), followed by interpersonal relationships (15%), others (12.5%), finances (11.7%) and academic pressure (7.5%).

As per the hypothesis, results were highly significant for perceived stress; final year female college students scored higher than first year female college students. The following studies support these findings;

When student enrol for final years, he/she is introduced with new stressors. After completing his graduation, students have to struggle to make their career in the field they have chosen years back. Students have to train themselves well for the job market. Preparing for various entrance examinations to get admission in good universities for higher studies and placements in public and private organizations is an additional academic burden on students during the final year. In addition to these, expectations from parents, responsibilities towards family also create stress and anxiety among final year students (Ramteke et. al. 2016)

The final-year students were in moderate levels of stress but among the undergraduate students, they scored the highest. This may be due to the higher level of university education which causes more academic stress (Fan & Wang, 2001) or their consideration about their job opportunities as they graduate (Wang, 2005).

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Significant stress was reported by students for items dealing with anxieties regarding future, namely, fear of unemployment, pursuing post-graduation, the clinic set up, and to be a successful dentist (Tangade, 2011)

Researchers discovered that students in their final year experienced much more academic stress than those in their middle and first years. This outcome can be a result of the greater workload in the last year, which involves writing projects and doing research. It could also be brought on by anxiety and stress about final results and employment prospects (Aihie & Ohanaka, 2019)

Another study showed similar results as prevalence of severe stress was significantly greater in the 3rd year as compared to other years explored. (Abdulghani et. al. 2020)

(Kotabal et. al. 2023) also found that the female students and final year students showed significant association with the level of stress.

### CONCLUSION

As it is evident from the above-mentioned findings and analysis, the female college students in their final year of study experience more stress than in first year. Additionally, it is suggested that the colleges should routinely setup appropriate counselling programmes to enhance students' overall wellbeing as they'll benefit from being able to openly discuss their issues with the counsellor and it will also enhance students' mental health as a whole and enable them to develop greater optimism and stress tolerance.

#### *Limitations of the study*

Authors acknowledge that this is a study with sample of only limited first and final year female students drawn from few colleges of Ludhiana. Furthermore, the findings of this study are based on self-reported information provided by students and some potential for reporting bias may have occurred because of respondent's interpretation of the questions or simply because of inaccuracies of responses or desire to report their emotions in a certain way. It could be considered as one of the limitations of this study.

A prospective study could be carried out with a larger sample size regarding stress levels of students from almost all colleges of the Ludhiana district with usage of in person data collection procedure as well as include male students and /or assessing whether stress levels prevail as prior to examinations or in general only.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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