

## A Study on Grit and Perceived Stress Among Final-Year Students of Undergraduate

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### ABSTRACT

Grit is a positive component and the major factor within an individual that enables one to overcome barriers and achieve their long-term goals with hard work and dedication whereas Perceived Stress is the perception and evaluation of one's current life situation. It refers to the way how individuals view and interpret the difficulties and daily hassles they are exposed to. This research is about "A Study on Grit and Perceived Stress among Final Year Students (Undergraduate)". It is intended to study the relationship and the influence of grit on perceived stress levels specifically among final-year students (Undergraduate). The primary goals of the study are to find the Grit level, Perceived Stress level, and the relationship between them. Final-year students of undergraduate are taken as the sample. Tools used are the 12-Item Grit Scale by Angela Duckworth, A.L. et al (2007), and The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) by Cohen et al (1983). This is a correlational study conducted among 165 final-year students of undergraduate from the course stream of Arts and Science and to collect data from the samples (n = 165) the Random sampling method is utilized. Pearson correlation coefficient for the variables Perceived Stress and Grit is -.350 which is significant at the level 0.01. Hence, the results indicate that there is a weak negative correlation between the variables. Also, the research provides an understanding of the importance among students to focus on and develop their grit level to cope with their perceived stress level.

**Keywords:** *Perceived stress, Grit, Final Year students*

**G**rit is a personality trait that is characterized by perseverance and passion for achieving long-term goals. Grit means working strenuously to overcome challenges and maintaining effort and interest over time despite failures, adversities, and plateaus in progress. Recent studies suggest this trait may have an impact in determining a person's higher achievement than intelligence. For example, grit may be particularly important to accomplish an especially complex task when there is a strong temptation to give up altogether. (*APA Dictionary of Psychology*, 2018.). Grit can also be defined as the determination within an individual to achieve a goal by overcoming day-to-day obstacles. Along with the sense of purpose and finding meaning in the pursuits, Grit involves the ability to maintain effort over an extended period. It is marked by consistency in pursuing goals and being resilient during the process. Grit is not about achieving a goal with the

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occasional burst of effort but about sustained consistency and commitment to the objectives. It is characterized and maintained by having a long-term vision that fuels their intrinsic motivation which leads to a growth mindset and willingness to learn from experiences whether they are successes or failures.

Angela Duckworth, PhD, American academic, Psychologist coined the term “Grit” and gave the theory of grit. Her work on the “Theory of Grit” earned attention after her TED talk in 2013. Duckworth conducted a study on children and adults in challenging environments, including West Point military cadets, national spelling bee contestants, and rookie teachers in difficult schools. Her research aimed to find the reason behind people being successful. Across the numerous contexts, one predictor of success is Grit. An individual with quality “grit” works hard and maintains focus – not only for weeks or months but also for years (Anderson, 2019). In 2016, she wrote the book “Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance” and the theory gained attention among the public, as audiences from elementary school teachers to army generals wanted to know more about grit and most of them tried to develop their grit level. (*The Gritty Truth*, 2020.). As a result of the study, people have begun to focus on non-cognitive factors such as Grit, Emotional maturity, Interpersonal skills, Empathy, Teamwork, etc. to assess the rate of success of individuals rather than relying only on cognitive variables such as Memory, Attention span, Multi-tasking, Pattern Recognition, Information processing, etc. Individuals who have this personality trait consistently stick to the future, fall forward, work for his/her goals, and make their dreams come true despite having several challenges. Moreover, these individuals possess a long-lasting love and passion, burning desire, high tolerance for discomfort, intense focus, clear vision, consistent self-discipline, and genuine interest in their objectives. Resilience and adaptability are considered important factors of grit because they lead individuals to view failures as learning opportunities, navigate challenges with a growth-oriented perspective, and turn setbacks into stepping stones for growth.

According to Angela Duckworth, Grit is a characteristic that can be cultivated through practice and dedication. But there are some barriers which can undermine its development. They include setting unrealistic goals, lacking clarity in goals, having low belief in one’s ability (low level of self-efficacy), having a low level of intrinsic motivation, avoiding taking risks or persisting in the face of setbacks to protect themselves from perceived failures, societal expectations, family pressures, peer influences, insufficient emotional, social, financial support, poor planning, desire for immediate gratification and results, pessimistic outlook, fixed mindset or self-defeating thoughts, stress, overcommitment, inability to adapt to environmental changes, imbalance in work and personal life. Of these hurdles, this study specifically focused on how people perceive and deal with their daily challenges and how grit plays an influential role.

Perceived stress is defined as how an individual interprets his or her life experiences and becomes aware of the amount of stress he or she is exposed to in a period. It is related to a feeling of uncertainty and instability about life and it differs from person to person based on their confidence in one’s ability to handle difficulties. (Huh et al., 2021). Wang et al. described perceived stress as an impactful psychological factor as it refers to the degree to which events in a person’s life are assessed as stressful, unpredictable, and uncontrollable (Wang et al., 2019). When stress is the physiological and psychological response to stressors, perceived stress is an individual’s subjective assessment of the stress one experiences. It is not about the level of stress experienced by an individual due to the intensity of external stressors but about the level of stress determined by the appraisal of the

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external stressors and it is of no importance regardless of how small or enormous the source of stress is. It is about the way someone interprets the event.

Perceived stress is closely related to the “Cognitive Appraisal Theory”. Richard Lazarus and Folkman gave the theory “Cognitive Appraisal” in 1984. This concept of cognitive appraisal was advanced in the year 1966. According to this theory, stress is perceived as the imbalance between the demands placed on the individual and the individual’s resources to cope. Also, stress is a two-way process that involves environmental stressors and the response of the individual to those stressors. The process of interpreting an event and its outcome is known as Appraisal. It differs from person to person. Cognitive Appraisal refers to the personal interpretation of an event which influences the extent to which the event is perceived as stressful. It includes two types. Primary appraisal is about the interpretation of an event as safe and secure or threatening and stressful and on the other hand, Secondary appraisal is about looking for resources to deal with a stressful environment. It can be either a positive or negative secondary appraisal. (*Stress and Cognitive Appraisal - Lazarus and Folkman, 2024.*)

Perceived stress is mainly caused due to coping styles and personality traits people possess. Every individual is different and everybody has several coping mechanisms and strategies to deal with stress. If an individual has maladaptive coping strategies, he/she may perceive the event and face consequences differently than someone who has an adaptive way of coping. And, personality traits such as neuroticism increases the individual’s proneness to perceive an event negatively. Most of the time, major changes such as the death of a life partner, losing a job, repeated failures and daily hassles such as traffic, work pressure, and interpersonal conflicts with people in life contribute to perceived stress. Apart from the above-mentioned factors, work, and social environment, lack of social connections, and poor health conditions are also the causal factors of perceived stress. Perceived stress tends to increase within an individual when he/she experiences traumatic events in the past, uncertainty, or lack of control regarding the future as well as the present. Individuals differ from one another in a wide range of ways, involving the influence of society and cultural norms on one’s perception, thoughts, values, beliefs, and personality. So, enhancing adaptive culturalist values serves a purpose for developing an individual’s well-being. To resolve the perceived stress, there are several coping strategies. Some of them include identifying stressors to deal with them, challenging negative thought patterns and reframing irrational beliefs, connecting with peer groups, developing problem-solving skills, and seeking professional help. It is important to consider how one interprets and perceives situations because it can harm an individual’s physical and psychological well-being.

The study specifically focused on Final year students of Undergraduate whose ages may range from 19 -21. Generally, they belong to the ‘Early adulthood’ stage which means moving into another phase of life. It requires mental toughness and physical, and social wellbeing. According to Erickson, in the psychosocial stages of development, young adults in this stage are supposed to form intimate, loving relationships with other people. If an individual fails to form a relationship, it results in loneliness and isolation. (*Understanding Erikson’s Stages of Psychosocial Development, 2022.*). Development and changes within an Individual’s Identity generally strengthen during the late teens and early twenties rather than adolescence as it is the challenging period of life where people experience several changes in their lives. It includes exploring career choices, finding a partner, forming meaningful relationships, and setting the foundation for adulthood. Emerging adulthood is an extended period for exploring what individuals between the ages of 18 and 25 want out of work, love,

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and life. (Beyer et al., 2022). The early adulthood stage is a crucial time for academics as well. Mainly, final-year students whose ages range from 19 -21 face several obstacles. The primary reason behind selecting final-year students as a sample for the study was that the final year tends to be quite challenging. It includes adapting and maintaining more independence in studies, managing increased workloads, developing critical reasoning, balancing academics and personal responsibilities, considering future careers more seriously, coping with stress related to exams, assignments, and the competitive nature of higher education, building professional networks, managing finance independently, enhancing communication skills and gaining broader perspectives on various subjects, etc. Coping with these day-to-day activities requires a positive viewpoint, growth mindset, intrinsic motivation, Internal locus of control, etc but, when an individual's viewpoint on a problem or a situation changes, it could end in a negative outcome.

The purpose of the study was to find the influence of Grit on Perceived stress. Several studies have concluded that grit is a positive component of an individual that influences life satisfaction, well-being, academic performance, and so on. Despite the growing interest in grit, there remained a noticeable gap in the literature regarding its connection with perceived stress levels. This study aimed to address this gap by whether individuals with higher levels of grit experience lower levels of perceived stress. This research aimed to determine whether grit acts as a protective factor over elevated perceived stress level. This study also intended to give significant insights across multiple disciplines by looking at the relationship between grit and stress.

The research was done to shed light on research fields as well as welcome theoretical frameworks, providing a foundation for future research. The research findings could be applied in practical life as well. Through the findings, interventions mainly in the academic field and in several other fields could be made. Individuals in educational and professional settings frequently face high-pressure situations and challenging assignments. Investigating the role of grit in dealing with stress might have practical implications in educational institutions, businesses, and other settings where perseverance and dedication are valued. This might also involve decision-making processes and improving professional practices etc. In addition to these, one could gain awareness about themselves, and the traits they possess which contribute to personal development initiatives aimed at improving coping skills.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Park et al. (Park et al., 2018) conducted a study in 2018 that was intended to understand the way middle school students perceive the school culture and its influence on grit level. Having a sample size of 1277 students, the results indicated that students who perceived their schools as more mastery goal-oriented were grittier and earned higher report card grades. And, when there was a change in perceiving the mastery school goal structure, there was a change in grit level. In contrast, Changes in perceived performance school goal structure did not reliably predict changes in grit.

Alhadabi and Karpinski (Alhadabi & Karpinski, 2020) conducted a study in 2020 that intended to study the relationships between grit, self-efficacy, achievement orientation goals, and academic performance in parallel and serial mediation models with 258 samples (N = 258). The samples responded to an online survey containing demographic items and scales measuring the non-cognitive factors noted above. The results demonstrated that 'grit' is positively associated with academic performance through a series of mediators including self-efficacy and achievement orientation goals and it supported the positive relationships

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between mastering tasks, approach-oriented goals, and academic performance, as well as the negative association between avoidance-oriented goals and academic performance.

Graves et al. (Graves et al., 2021) conducted a study in 2021 that was intended to study stress, coping mechanisms, and gender differences in undergraduate students ( $n = 448$ ) towards the end of the semester. The results had shown that there is a difference exists in the way males, and females perceive stress and also coping with it. The females were reported to have higher total PSS than their male counterparts. The study showed that more female students reported “moderate” levels of stress compared to male students. There was a significant ( $p < 0.05$ ) gender difference for four coping strategies, i.e., self-distractions, emotional support, instrumental support, and venting where the female students utilized more emotion-focused coping strategies than their male counterparts did.

In 2023, Apte and Bhatt (Apte & Bhatt, 2023) conducted a study to examine the family environment and perceived stress among working and non-working women ( $n=60$ ) in which the results indicated that there was no significant difference between perceived stress and family environment among working and non-working women and both groups of women experienced the same level of perceived stress.

Farooqui et al. (Farooqui et al., 2023) conducted research in 2023 to compare high and low levels of perceived stress among 116 students who consume coffee and found that there was a significant difference between high-perceived stress students who take caffeinated drinks regularly and high-perceived stress students. A T-test was conducted on every hypothesis and based on that, the results were concluded.

Kalia (Kalia, 2021) conducted two research in 2021 to study gritty goal pursuit and perceived chronic stress on college students. The first study with 101 students who completed the scales for Grit and Perceived stress resulted in a negative correlation between both variables and the second study with 127 participants who completed the scales for college adjustment with Grit and perceived chronic stress resulted in a negative correlation between both facets. Both studies indicated that gritty pursuit is associated with reduced chronic stress levels.

In 2018, Christopoulou et al. (Christopoulou et al., 2018) researched to study grit, perceived stress, and hope by having 131 research scholars as samples. The scores were compared across (male and female) genders and faculties. The results indicated that all three variables are highly correlated with each other where males and females differed significantly in their hope scores.

### ***Objectives***

The objectives of the study are to find the grit and perceived stress levels of final-year students of undergraduate and the relationship between grit and perceived stress levels among final-year students of undergraduate.

### ***Hypothesis***

**H1** - There is a significant relationship between grit and perceived stress level.

## RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

### *Sample*

The samples of the study comprised hundred and sixty-five final-year students of undergraduate whose ages ranged from 19 to 21. The study included both males and females. The study was descriptive and it utilized the correlational research design. The majority of the data were collected from students in Madurai and many colleges in Trichy. The inclusion criteria fall on the characteristics of final-year students of undergraduate who pursue their bachelor's degree in the Arts and Science stream. Individuals who failed to fit into the inclusion criteria were excluded from the study.

**Sampling method** - Simple Random sampling technique.

### *Instruments*

Two instruments were used in this study,

- 1. 12-item grit scale:** Angela Duckworth and colleagues developed the scale in 2007. It measures the individual's perseverance and passion for long-term goals. It consists of 12 items each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 (Not like me at all) to 5 (Very much like me). It has reverse scoring for items 2,3,5,7,8,11. The overall scoring is done by adding all the points and dividing by 12. The maximum score on the scale is 5 (Extremely Gritty) and the lowest score on the scale is 1 (Not at all gritty). Studies assessing the Grit scale have reported that Cronbach's alpha is ranging from 0.70 to 0.85, indicating good internal consistency and reliability among the scale items. The scale has test-retest reliability where the scores range from 0.70 to 0.80 (by conducting several studies). By comparing the scale with other scales, it shows that the Grit scale has convergent Validity as the score ranges from 0.40 to 0.60. the scale also has discriminant validity and predictive validity.
- 2. Perceived Stress Scale:** Cohen et al. developed the Perceived Stress Scale in 1983. The items in this scale are about feelings and thoughts during the last month which means that this scale measures the perceived stress by focusing on "the recent past experiences". It has 10 items each rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very often). It has reverse scoring for the question 4,5,7,8. The overall scoring is done by adding up all the scores. Final Scores may range from 0 to 40, in which scores from 0 to 13 would be considered as low stress, scores from 14 to 26 would be considered as moderate stress, and scores from 27 to 40 would be considered as high perceived stress. Studies assessing the Perceived Stress scale have reported that Cronbach's alpha is ranging from 0.70 to 0.90, indicating good internal consistency and reliability among the scale items. The scale has test-retest reliability where the scores range from 0.70 to 0.80 (by conducting several studies). The Scale was developed based on expert judgment and theoretical considerations, ensuring content validity. The scale is also reported to have construct validity and criterion validity.

### *Procedure*

Participants were selected randomly and the google form was circulated to them. Once after going through the consent form, participants were ready to volunteer in the study and started to fill out the form. The form has 22 items (12 items from the grit scale and 10 items from the perceived stress scale) and socio-demographic details. Scoring was calculated according to the criteria given by the authors of the scales and then the analysis was done.

**RESULTS AND INTERPRETATION**

To describe the data, Mean and Standard Deviation were computed. To find the correlation between the variables, the Pearson correlation was utilized.

*Table 1 Descriptive Analysis of Grit and Perceived Stress*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
PS	165	1	38	21.28	4.780
Grit	165	24	57	37.68	5.358
Valid N (listwise)	165				

*Note.* For the variables PS and Grit, mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values are computed. The mean score for PS (Perceived Stress) is approximately 21.28 with a standard deviation of 4.780. The mean score for Grit (Grit) is approximately 37.68 with a standard deviation of 5.358.

*Table 2 Correlation Analysis for Grit and Perceived Stress*

Correlations			
		PS	Grit
PS	Pearson Correlation	1	-.350**
	Sig. (2 – tailed)		.000
	N	165	165
Grit	Pearson Correlation	-.350**	1
	Sig. ( 2 – tailed)	.000	
	N	165	165

*Note.* The Pearson correlation coefficient for the variables Perceived Stress and Grit is -0.350 (Pearson’s  $r = -0.350$ ). This indicates that there is a weak negative correlation between PS (Perceived Stress) and Grit (Grit) at the significance of 0.01 level (2-tailed) where  $p < 0.05$ . This suggests that there is a linear relationship between PS (Perceived Stress) and Grit (Grit)

\*Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level (2 – tailed)

*Table 3 Descriptive Analysis of Socio-Demographic Details*

Descriptive Statistics					
	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	165	18	24	19.90	.831
Gender male1 female2	165	1	2	1.45	.499
Birth order	165	1	3	1.54	.610
Economic status	165	1	3	1.92	.312
Geographical location	165	1	3	1.61	.695
Course stream	165	1	2	1.53	.500
Valid N (listwise)	165	1			

*Note.* The mean score of Age is approximately 19.90 with a standard deviation of .831. The mean score of Gender male1 female2 is approximately 1.45 with a standard deviation of .499. The mean score of Birth order is approximately 1.54 with a standard deviation of .610. The mean score of Economic status is approximately 1.92 with a standard deviation of .312. The mean score of Geographical location is approximately 1.61 with a standard deviation of .695. The mean score of the Course stream is approximately 1.53 with a standard deviation of .500.

## DISCUSSION

In today's world of education, recent years have witnessed several challenges for both school and college students, including peer pressure, academic pressure, attempting to satisfy parents and teachers, and attaining short- and long-term goals. Because of these students are experiencing stress which may lead to mental health consequences. This research focused on studying the relationship between variables "Grit and perceived Stress". Grit is taken as the independent variable and the relationship of this variable is studied with Perceived Stress which is taken as the dependent variable. Data were collected from the samples and interpreted among the participants by using a standardized questionnaire. The statistical analysis conducted provided valuable insights into the relationship between Perceived Stress (PS) and Grit, shedding light on how these two psychological constructs interact and influence individuals' well-being and resilience.

Firstly, the descriptive statistics offer a comprehensive overview of the distribution and central tendencies of Perceived Stress and Grit within the sample. Table 1 shows the mean, standard deviation, minimum, and maximum values for grit and perceived stress. The mean score for PS (Perceived Stress) is approximately 21.28 with a standard deviation of 4.780. The mean score for Grit (Grit) is approximately 37.68 with a standard deviation of 5.358, these details imply that the majority of participants fall within a central range of scores for both Perceived Stress and Grit.

The statistic-correlation analysis has shown that there is a significant negative correlation between Perceived Stress and Grit, indicating that as levels of Grit increase, levels of Perceived Stress tend to decrease, and vice versa. Table 2 shows the Pearson correlation coefficient for the variables Perceived Stress and Grit is -0.350 (Pearson's  $r = -0.350$ ). This indicates that there is a weak negative correlation between PS (Perceived Stress) and Grit (Grit) at the significance of 0.01 level (2-tailed) where  $p < 0.05$ , which means that the chosen variables "Grit and Perceived Stress" are different from each other and both have a weak negative relationship. The sample size can be the reason for the obtained results. The result also suggests that there is a linear relationship between PS (Perceived Stress) and Grit (Grit). This finding suggests that individuals who perceive higher levels of stress may struggle to maintain high levels of perseverance and passion for long-term goals, as measured by grit. Conversely, individuals with higher levels of grit may possess better coping mechanisms to manage stressors effectively, leading to lower perceived stress levels.

The results which indicate the weak correlation between the two variables may be due to several factors. It includes Age, Gender, Economic status, Birth order, Geographical location and, Course stream. The Mean, Median, and Standard deviation of demographic details are listed in Table 3. The mean score of Age is approximately 19.90 with a standard deviation of .831. The mean score of Gender is approximately 1.45 with a standard deviation of .499. The mean score of Birth order is approximately 1.54 with a standard deviation of .610. The mean score of Economic status is approximately 1.92 with a standard deviation of .312. The mean score of Geographical location is approximately 1.61 with a standard deviation of .695. The mean score of the Course stream is approximately 1.53 with a standard deviation of .500.

Diving deeper, Age may play a crucial role in shaping a student's resilience and endurance level because individuals undergo several changes as they age. By the order in which individuals are born, there may be differing life experiences through which they learn numerous strategies that may or may not lead to higher levels of grit and potentially lower

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levels of perceived stress. The ability of students to cope with stress and develop resilience may be impacted by their economic condition as well as their geographical location which also determines their access to resources and support groups. These difficulties may worsen their perceived stress levels and impair their academic achievement. Similarly, final-year undergraduate students' academic experiences and perceived stress levels may also be greatly impacted by their choice of course stream. Various fields have various levels of seriousness, competition, and workload, which determine how students feel and how much they rely on grit to get through difficult academic times. Gender may play an important role in determining how final-year undergraduate students perceive stress and experience grit. Several researches suggest that women generally experience higher levels of perceived stress than men do, for a variety of reasons including social, biological, and cultural ones. In conclusion, to prevent detrimental effects on final-year students of undergraduate, Grit should be seen as a key component in the field of education and efforts must be taken to raise its level because it is an essential quality that preserves a person's sense of self, enables them to overcome obstacles, and helps them navigate life.

### CONCLUSION

The analysis represents a significant relationship and weak negative correlation between the variables Grit and Perceived Stress which rejects the null hypothesis, accepting the alternate. The Pearson correlation coefficient for the variables Perceived Stress and Grit is  $-.350$  ( $p = -.350$ ) and the correlation is significant at level 0.01.

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### **Conflict of Interest**

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