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Research Paper

Studying the Use of Thought Control Strategies for Academic Stressors among College Students

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ABSTRACT

This research studies the use of thought control strategies for academic stressors among college students. It involved standardized psychometric tests for quantitative measure of academic stress and strategies of thought control from a sample of 90 college students both at undergraduate and postgraduate level of different courses ranging from 17 years to 28 years collected through the means of online survey. Findings observed through Independent samples Kruskal wallis two tailed test analysis showed that worry and punishment as thought control strategy varied significantly with varying level of academic stress ranging from low to high, while social control, reappraisal and distraction used for thought control did not significantly vary between low, moderate and high academic stress suggesting the need to consider the complex interaction of worry and punishment thought control technique imperative to high academic stress. Theoretical framework included metacognition model, cognitive triad and ABC model by Albert Ellis supporting the background of the study. Practical implications highlight the potential baseline findings of the study supporting future therapeutic interventions, planning and assessments in educational institutions to cater for reducing the use of thought control strategies impeding effective regulation and enhancing academic resilience strategies replacing worry and punishment for thought control. Limitation such as sample diversity and contextual variability has been taken into account in this present study. Future research implications would be to consider a comprehensive approach for understanding the effect of general stressors along with academic stress affecting the dynamic interplay between the effects and utility of thought control techniques.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Thought Control Strategies, Worry, Punishment, Distraction, Reappraisal, Social Control*

Academic stress is a common experience of college students and has a significant effect on their performance which includes reduced academic motivation, hindered academic performance (Pascoe et al., 2020) and well-being due to negatively

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impacted mental health (Green et al., 2021). The effects of academic stress can be cognitive, emotional, and physical health when such stress affects the students' academic performance. Academic stress can arise from the different sources students may experience such as academic demands, expectations, and competitiveness in college context. Furthermore, academic stress can result not only to negative academic performance but also to negative effects on subjective well-being of students which includes anxiety, depression, and other forms of psychological distress. Therefore, such consideration of academic stress is essential in order to improve students' performance and psychological well-being at school. Gupta (2020) described academic stress as "a term associated with the ineffective and unhealthy reaction to the demands of the changes in the task and process of learning" Lal (2014) defined academic stress as the, "mental distress linked with some expected frustrations such as academic failure or unawareness of the possibility of such failure". Wells and Davies (1994) defined Thought Control Strategies as, "the covert attempts made by the individuals to manage the undesirable and unpleasant thoughts. Five thought control strategies were proposed which include punishment (e.g., I punish myself for thinking the thought), worry (e.g., I dwell on other worries), reappraisal (e.g., I try a different way of thinking about it), distraction (e.g. I call to mind positive images instead), and social control (e.g., I find out how my friends deal with these thoughts)". University students face unwanted or intrusive thoughts due to the complex nature of academic stress, which leads students to ruminate. The psychological impact of stress is prominently expressed in the increase of negative thoughts and emotions; rumination correlates with stress and worse mental health (Barbayannis et al., 2022a). Rumination aggravates anxiety and depression; students often ruminate about negative aspects related to school. Furthermore, intrusive thinking is persistent, which can affect cognitive functions such as concentration. Adrian Wells metacognitive model is a formal model on intrusive thoughts regulation mechanism in students with high prevalence of academic stress. Metacognitive beliefs are the core principle of the model. Metacognitive beliefs are related to control strategy in thoughts or intrusive thoughts regulation (Hallard et al., 2021). An instrument that is commonly used to measure intrusive thoughts control beliefs domain is Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ). This instrument is useful to explore possible findings related to thoughts control to decrease the effect of stress on cognition and emotion function. Using TCQ as measurement to observations in the metacognitive model, maladaptive thought control strategies in students can be discovered that impact on cognitive and emotional action. These findings can be used to determine intervention to decrease maladaptive strategy development on thoughts control in stressful conditions. Applying metacognition and TCQ can be effective to deliver interventions on academic stress and increase academic performance. The Cognitive Triad, which was developed by Aaron Beck, can be an appreciated model to understand the relationship between intrusive thoughts, negative affect and behavior in the academic setting. The cognitive Triad describes how a student's thoughts about themselves, the environment (school and academic setting) and their prospects (the future) affect how they feel and behave. Negative student thoughts about themselves perpetuate stress in the academic environment which can lead to increased intrusive thoughts and a decreased ability to cope with academic pressures and demands. Recognizing thinking patterns in students can be vital to addressing how these cognitions lead to mental health problems, including anxiety and depression and the impact of these affective components on academic performance (Myhr et al., 2019). Consequently, recognizing this cognitive triad can be key and adopting delivery interventions to this cognition will have an effect on the colleagues' mental health will positively impact on their academic involvement and well-being. Extending this perspective from the infamous model, Ellis (2010) indicates that "people make themselves uncomfortable with the things that happen to them, with their thoughts,

emotions, and actions". Relating to our current study here the academic stressors does not specifically lead to negative consequences in the form of negative emotions and behaviour rather it actually relies on the cognitive evaluation of the event when faced with such situations how individuals deal with such unpleasant and unwanted thoughts. Hence thought control questionnaire serves as a tool which enables the control of intrusive thoughts (Sahin et al., 2019). Finally, it is crucial to emphasize the early identification of the risk factors associated with academic stress which can predict for future mental health outcomes as supported by the early life significant events, parental separation and transition from rural to urban lifestyle in college students (Mao XL et al., 2023)

REVIEW OF LITERATURE

Academic stress sources and outcome

Studies have highlighted the significant academic stressors which mainly consist of lacking a sense of fulfillment, fearful consequences associated with outcome, faculty student relationship discrepancy associated challenges and lack of adequate study opportunities amongst the University students (Reddy et al., 2018) which is consistent with the findings of school students in eleventh and twelfth grade who reported academic stress resulting from time pressure, expectations from parents and comparison resulting from relatives and individuals in the context of close neighbourhood (Gogoi et al., 2023). Further, it has been consistently established where academic stress is strongly linked to academic outcome and its relationship to motivation on the task irrespective of the gender differences (Sahu et al., 2024) while another study extends the findings by considering aspects of age and socioeconomic differences suggesting stress as a universal obstruction to academic performance (Shreemathi et al., 2022). Instrumental to this test anxiety is said to play a crucial role in enhancing the effect of academic stress and thereby affecting the performance of students however positive parental expectations and effective emotional regulation attenuates the impact (Zheng et al., 2023). Additionally, high levels of academic stress determine the mental health well being of the students which depends on the individual's perception of their needs and ability to master the outcome of the situation (Córdova Olivera et al., 2023).

Worry and academic performance

In a sample of undergraduate students it was found that worry at social and health related means enhanced the academic outcome by serving as motivational drive and problem focused strategy across varied age groups (Hamid et al., 2020) while conflicting with the results of another study which identified acute worry affects the attention on the task henceforth related to lower academic success (Horton et al., 2024).

Interplay between perfectionism, worry and rumination

Previous studies have highlighted the role of perfectionism in underscoring the effect of academic stress, resulting from the unrealistic expectations for task outcomes; it leads to rumination and worry which in turn worsens the overall outcome leading to academic burnout and increases the risk of anxiety and depressive symptoms (Gil et al., 2023).

Influence of thought control strategies

Research indicates the utility of thought control strategies for predicting the mental health outcomes, with social control, reappraisal and distraction are considered as appropriate beliefs while worry and punishment are regarded as the inappropriate thought control strategies among both men and women (Dadashzadeh et al., 2014), consistent with this five-factor model was successfully validated among adolescents classified into five areas namely

distraction, social interaction, re-evaluating thoughts, worry, and self-punishment as a as strategies for the control of unwanted thoughts (Whiting et al., 2014). Similarly, a study identified thought control ability moderated the relationship between trait self-control and subjective well-being while the second part of the same study revealed thought control benefits individuals more in reducing harmful behaviours than enhancing constructive ones (Massar et al., 2020). Additionally, it was supported that thought control strategies were strongly related to worry (Mahmodi et al., 2024) while in another study extends the scope of significant relationship between perceived stress and thought control strategies (Mohamed et al., 2020). In relation to parenting styles, authoritative parenting style exhibited a significantly positive correlation with distraction reappraisal, while demonstrating a negative correlation with worry suggesting that parenting styles and practices in early childhood significantly influence children's metacognitive development (Yamini et al., 2017). However, in another study educational and motivational self-talk has no significant impact for controlling intrusive thoughts in teenage female swimmers (Hadadan et al., 2018). In another study, involving non clinical sample university students using thought control strategies, there was a significant positive connection between self-punishment, social control and pathological worry however it was concluded that trait anxiety was a much better predictor of pathological worry (khanipour H 2011). In relation to personality types, thought control strategies namely distraction, worry and punishment varied significantly among type A, B and D personality types respectively. However, type B and type D varied distinctively with respect to use of worry as a strategy among students of medical science in Iran (Radsepehr et al., 2016).

Distraction and academic stress

Studies have observed that distraction enables boosting the mood thereby improving problem solving and reduced stress and anxiety in academic settings (Gebhart et al., 2019). However negative thoughts and situational context of examination ruled out for the described effects (Oikawa et al., 2010).

Cognitive reappraisal and stress management

In a sample of dental students the group which was subjected to cognitive reappraisal technique reported reduction in stress as compared to general stress management strategy (Smith et al., 2019) while another study supported the use of cognitive reappraisal associated with stressful situations predicting better mental health outcomes in a sample of Middle Eastern college students (Vally et al., 2020).

Academic stress and coping strategies

Research studies across varied sample of Nigerian (Dada et al., 2019) and (Barman et al., 2023) Shillong, Meghalaya students consistently underscored the importance of coping mechanisms to deal with academic stressors , specific to this another study accounts for implementing mental resilience approaches into the classroom as early intervention and prevent the emergence of teenage mental health risks (Robson et al., 2024) with a related study which emphasizes the use of data driven approach to identify the stressors and customize therapies according to individual requirements (Awofala et al., 2024). Findings from the student population indicated that self regulation and mindfulness is associated with downplaying the effects of academic stress suggesting low levels of academic stress is associated with enhanced emotional intelligence and mindfulness (Zhang et al., 2024). However, in a study involving undergraduate students reported a relationship between academic stress and self regulation was not mediated by mindfulness (Hj Ramli et al., 2018). Finally, in a sample of nursing students it was found that cognitive flexibility partially

mediated the relationship between academic stress and subjective happiness, extending the scope for planning cognitive flexibility focused programme development (No et al., 2024).

Aims and Objective

- To identify the level of academic stress faced by university students.
- To establish if there is a significant relationship between the thought control strategies and varying levels of academic stress among undergraduate students.

Rationale

The Thought Control Strategies allows for effective management of such disruptive thoughts and resulting consequences as evidenced by the findings of the study which suggests that thought control strategies brings down the focus of working memory from irrelevant details associated with rumination on negative thoughts and likelihood of depressive symptoms (Joormann and Gotlib, 2010). Thus, our current study examines the role of thought control strategies in the context of managing academic stress among university students, utilising the Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ) which enables us to understand the most commonly observed thought control strategies that students may employ to alleviate the adverse effects of academic stress.

Research Gap

The study takes into account responses from different courses which highlights the contextual differences in terms of academic stress exposure and experience resulting in dynamic understanding in the use of thought control strategies. Hence in the present study by including academic stressor influences measured through the means of thought control questionnaire, with the non clinical sample of University students from different courses and background which improves the understanding of underlying individual differences and variability in the use of thought control strategies pertaining to institutional differences in terms of exposure to academic stress.

Hypotheses

- Null Hypothesis (H_0) - There isn't any significant difference between thought control strategies and academic stress among university students.
- Alternate Hypothesis (H_{a1} - There is a significant difference between Distraction and varying levels of academic stress among university students.
- Alternate Hypothesis H_{a2} -There is a significant difference between Social Control and varying levels of academic stress among university students.
- Alternate Hypothesis H_{a3} - There is a significant difference between Worry and varying levels of academic stress among university students.
- Alternate Hypothesis H_{a4} - There is a significant difference between Punishment and varying levels of academic stress among university students.
- Alternate Hypothesis H_{a5} - There is a significant difference between Re-appraisal and varying levels of academic stress among university students.

METHODOLOGY

Sample

Participants demographic characteristics included a sample of (n= 90) University students with age ranging from 17 to 28 years with female participants representative of 62.2% (n= 56) and male participants of 37.8% (n= 34) respectively from varied courses inclusive of BCOM LLB, Cancer biology, Applied Psychology, B.Tech Civil, BBA Hons, BA

(Economics, Political Science Hons./Hons. With Research), BSc Psychology Hons, BTech, Bsc, B.com, BA psychology, B.com Cost and management accounting, Emt, Food Nutrition and Dietetics, Optometry, Medical imaging technology, Btech (ECE), Bachelor Of Law, Cardiac technology, B.tech mechanical, Bsc Data Science, BSc (Hons) Data Science and Analytics, AMU, Law, LLM, Bsc. (Hon) biomedical science, M.Tech Integrated - Software Engineering, CRT and Mtech.

Instruments

Two measures were utilised in this study -

1. **Student Stress Inventory (SSI):** The Student Stress Inventory (SSI) was developed to assess stress levels in university students. It contains 40 negative statements divided into four subscales, each comprising of 10 items: Subscale 1 focuses on Physical stress, Subscale 2 on Interpersonal relationships, Subscale 3 on Academic stress, and Subscale 4 on Environmental factors. An ordinal scale system of scoring is used along with following options: 'Never', 'Somewhat frequent', 'Frequent', and 'Always', with weightage of 1, 2, 3, and 4, respectively. The reliability of the SSI subscales was as follows: a) Physical had a score of 0.807 (80.7%); b) Interpersonal Relationship scored 0.789 (78.9%); c) Academic received a score of 0.822 (82.2%); and d) Environmental was rated at 0.802 (80.2%). Among these, only academic stress was categorized into low, moderate, and high levels.
2. **Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ):** The Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ), created by Adrian Wells and Mark I. Davies in 1994, is a 30 - item tool used to evaluate the efficacy of techniques used to manage undesirable and intrusive thoughts. On a four-point scale, the ratings are as follows: 1 = never, 2 = sometimes, 3 = frequently, and 4 = nearly always. The TCQ evaluates five elements that reflect different strategies for managing unwanted thoughts: distraction (items 1, 9, 16, 19, 21, and 30); social control (items 5, 8, 12, 17, 25, and 29); worry (items 4, 7, 18, 22, 24, and 26); punishment (items 2, 6, 11, 13, 15, and 28); and re-appraisal (items 3, 10, 14, 20, 23, and 27). For the subscales, the test-retest correlations varied from. 67 to. 83 at intervals of six weeks. The overall score is . 83, suggesting that it is a reliable metric. The scores show fair to good internal consistency, as evidenced by a. 8 alpha value indicating high internal reliability.

Procedure

Responses were primarily obtained through the means of Google forms by survey mode of primary data collection with use of standardized psychometric tests namely students stress inventory (SSI) and Thought Control Questionnaire (TCQ). The data was initially checked for the descriptive statistics and test of normality, which indicated that out of five thought control strategies only distraction and reappraisal are normally distributed (Shapiro- Wilk Significance = 0.188 and 0.558) respectively. Since, parametric normality assumptions and homogeneity of variance are not met to establish the relationship between the thought control strategies thereby the non- parametric version of Independent samples Kruskal wallis, two tailed test was used which would account for the significant difference between thought control strategies and varied levels of academic stress along the median since the independent variable academic stress has more than two levels at ordinal level and dependent variable thought control strategies at continuous level of measurement which allows for the group comparison and also because of the representative small sample size for the study.

RESULTS

Table No. 1 Descriptive Statistics

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Age	90	17.00	28.00	20.9000	1.97768
Academic Stress	90	10.00	40.00	23.2667	6.57164
AS_Ord	90	1	3	1.94	.625
Distraction	90	6.00	24.00	16.1444	3.72227
Punishment	90	6.00	24.00	15.4889	3.56085
Re Appraisal	90	6.00	24.00	12.5000	4.21407
Social Control	90	14.00	26.00	18.8222	2.66301
Worry	90	6.00	24.00	13.3000	4.53315
Gender	90	1	2	1.62	.488
Valid N (listwise)	90				

Table No. 2 Gender Distribution

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Male	34	37.8	37.8	
	Female	56	62.2	62.2	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

Table No. 3 Academic Stress Ordinal Variable

		Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Valid	Low	20	22.2	22.2	22.2
	Moderate	55	61.1	61.1	83.3
	High	15	16.7	16.7	100.0
	Total	90	100.0	100.0	

AS_Ord: Academic Stress Ordinal Variable

Table No. 4 Test of Normality

	Kolmogorov-Smirnov			Shapiro-Wilk		
	Statistics	df	Sig.	Statistics	Df	Sig.
Distraction	091	90	. 064	. 980	90	. 188
Punishment	.114	90	. 006	. 959	90	. 006
Re_appraisal	.080	90	. 200*	. 988	90	. 558
Worry	.100	90	. 027	. 961	90	. 008
Social_Control	.104	90	. 017	. 970	90	. 036

*. This is a lower bound of the true significance.

a. Lilliefors Significance Correction

Table No. 5 Hypothesis Test Summary

	Null Hypothesis	Test	Sig.[a,b]	Decision
1.	The distribution of Distraction is the same across categories of AS_Ord	Kruskal-Wallis Test	.952	Retain the null hypothesis
2.	The distribution of Punishment is the same across categories of AS_Ord	Kruskal-Wallis Test	.006	Reject the null hypothesis
3.	The distribution of Re_appraisal is the same across categories of AS_Ord	Kruskal-Wallis Test	.217	Retain the null hypothesis
4.	The distribution of Worry is the same across categories of AS_Ord	Kruskal-Wallis Test	<.001	Reject the null hypothesis
5.	The distribution of Social_Control is the same across categories of AS_Ord	Kruskal-Wallis Test	.789	Retain the null hypothesis

The significance level is .050.
Asymptotic significance is displayed

Figure No. 1 Box Plot Analysis for Social Control

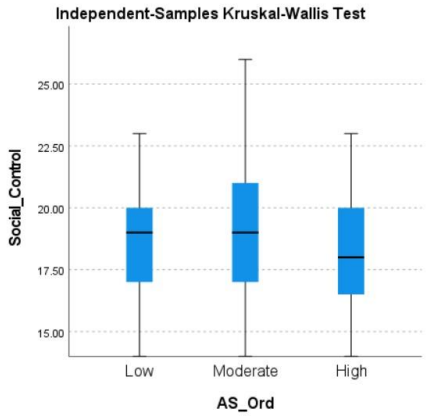


Figure No. 2 Box Plot Analysis for Worry

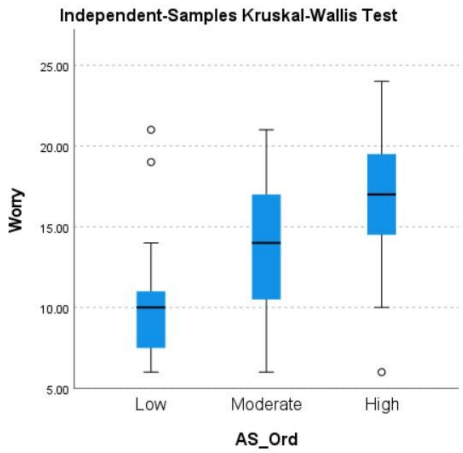


Figure No. 3 Box Plot Analysis for Distraction

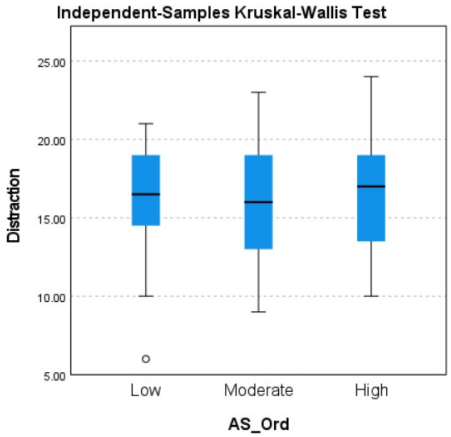


Figure No. 4 Box Plot Analysis for Punishment

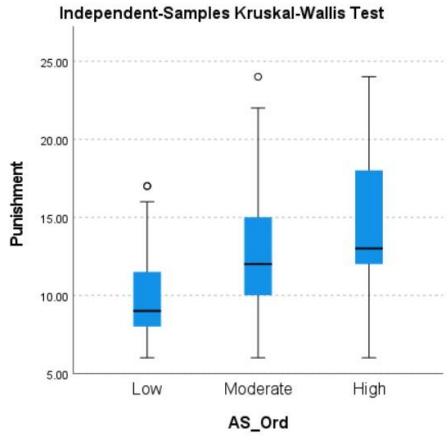
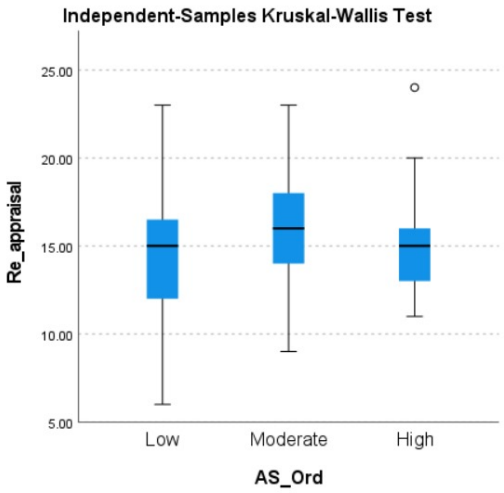


Figure No. 5 Box Plot Analysis for Re-appraisal



DISCUSSIONS

The descriptive statistics indicated the age group of the sample ranges between 17 to 28 years with the average individual age of the sample as 20.9 years. Further the academic

stress score ranged between 10 to 40 with average academic stress score value as 23.2667 (approx= 23.27). Out of the five thought control strategies it included distraction (mean = 16.14, SD = 3.72); reappraisal (mean= 15.49, SD= 3.56); punishment (mean= 12.5, SD= 4.21); social control (mean = 18.82, SD= 2.66) and worry (mean = 13.3, SD = 4.53) suggesting that social control is maximum on an average with least amount of variability amongst the sample. Further representative of different levels of academic stress, moderate stress accounted for 61.1% (n= 55), low stress for 22.2% (n= 20) and high stress for 16.7% (n= 15) respectively. Findings from two tailed , Independent samples Kruskal wallis test reported a significant difference between the use of punishment and worry as thought control strategies and varying level of academic stress with significance value of 0.006 and less than 0.001 respectively suggesting that the significant difference between worry and different levels of academic stress (mild, moderate and high) is rather very strong implying as the level of stress increases the use of worry as a thought control strategy increases respectively. Similarly, use of punishment as a thought control strategy increases with academic stress which leads to the acceptance of alternative hypothesis while the remaining alternative hypothesis for remaining thought control strategies namely social control, distraction and reappraisal is rejected since the difference between these strategies and varying level of academic is not significant enough to be retained implying there use as a thought control strategy in relation to academic stress is not strongly associated with its effects. As depicted through box plot representation we can infer that for both punishment and worry the median value is higher for high academic stress as compared to lower academic stress with the box plots at varying level of Y axis indicating the significant difference with increasing level of academic stress along with the outliers at low and moderate stress level for punishment while more outliers at low level and high level of academic stress for worry as a thought control strategy however this doesn't necessarily affect the overall distribution. Finally, in the case of distraction, reappraisal and social control the midpoint across mild, moderate and high stress lie almost closely at the same level along the Y axis consistent with the findings of hypothesis testing. A significant association emerged between levels of academic stress and punishment and worry as thought control strategies. An increase in the use of punishment and worry strategies with increasing levels of academic stress, as argued by Masha'al et al., is consistent with literature that identifies worry as both a fear-based coping strategy and a form of motivation in times of stress (Masha'al et al., 2022a). The prevalence of punishment and worry among students in high levels of academic stress may reflect the idea that students experience being overwhelmed with demands and turn to punishment and worrying as a way of coping with perceived challenges. In contrast to punishment and worry, levels of academic stress were not associated with the use of social control, distraction, or reappraisal. This finding suggests that the means of coping with academic stress may vary independently from each other. The non-significance of academic stress levels and these three forms of thought control strategies is similar to the results of Karaman et al. and suggest that student responses to stress may not necessarily take the form of stress coping techniques (Karaman et al., 2019). Both punishment and worry strategies have employed significant findings through the Kruskal-Wallis test, reflecting important consequences upon students enduring exceptionally high degrees of academic stress. Furthermore, students highlighted punishment and worry with significant p values (punishment $p = 0.006$ and worry $p < 0.001$). Such findings indicate that students exposing extreme-high levels of stress are more dependent and committed towards using punishment and worry strategies. As stated by Barbayannis et al., the extreme dependency upon punishment, and worry thought-control strategies, were present due to students contemplating the need for excessive demand to cope instantly, and in a fast manner, with the current stressor, due to the fact both thoughts

relieve, in a temporary form, stress experienced by students (Barbayannis et al., 2022b). Moreover, the notion that worry functions as a coping mechanism and motivational drive, was previously apparent in assessments, regarding how beneficial it could be to soon relieve the subject, yet how quickly it can lead to further accumulation of undesired stress (Abdalla A. M. Hamid, 2020a). These elaborations of the findings help provide greater insights into which thought control strategies are favoured disproportionately due to higher stress levels, and strengthen conceptions regarding potential interventions to reduce maladaptive thought control strategies. Nevertheless, the lack of significant results regarding social control, distraction, and reappraisal strategies brings up the possibility of a certain explanation. It has been hypothesized that stress is a complex and individual-dependent context and, therefore, not every strategy is consistently associated with stress levels. For example, social control refers to looking for support in others and may have a complex association with stress levels, as they are influenced by several mediators that were not measured by this study. In this sense, distraction and reappraisal are generally observed as adaptive strategies, but associations with this study's results may have not been apparent, as these strategies are more frequently used at different stages or contexts of the stress situation. In summary, e.g. worry and punishment are considered as direct responses to increasing levels of stress and other strategies are reflected through more complex coping strategies, which is why specific strategies warrant differentiated interventions based on personal contexts of stress exposure. There is, moreover, a noticeable overuse of punishment and worry strategies among students with high levels of academic stress which creates an interesting aspect for further discussion. In order to properly analyze this situation, it is essential to consider the characteristics of the demographic and the type of survey techniques used during the data collection of this study. First, the majority of the sample consisted of young adult students aged 17-28 years, who belong to a population group vulnerable to both academic demands and developmental struggles, thus rendering them more likely to react to stress more defensively. As for the type of survey method used, a snowball sampling technique may have drawn participants already with high stress levels even before the actual participation in the study, thereby potentially yielding a significant score for students who are inclined to use maladaptive strategies at the time. Lastly, academic punishment and worry strategies may have been more widely used mainly due to cultural aspects regarding the perception of stress and its possible responses, as encountering stimuli within certain settings may most likely unconsciously promote the take on punishment and worry as valid strategies for coping with academic problems (Barbayannis et al., 2022c). However, the current results regarding the excessive use of worry and punishment strategies among high-stress students aligned to previous findings indicating that students mainly resort to maladaptive strategies especially when their academic workload escalates (Yusufov et al., 2019a). This maladaptive response also spread as shown in the meta-analysis evaluated by Yusufov et al. among students which are showing limited intervention approaches (Yusufov et al., 2019b). Hence, the study results allow understanding of the link between the academic stress and control of thought strategies, which mostly depends on the average academic stress score and its distribution throughout students. The significance of the average stress score - 23.27, with more than half of students having a moderate or high level of stress - allows paying close attention to this issue. It means that students using worry and punishment strategies act under the influence of students with high-stress situations, and these behaviors may have become coping strategies for the most affected group. This indicates that high stress contributes to the strengthening of less adaptive strategies aligned with the specific group of people in the study. Thus, one may consider this issue for further development in more depth, focusing on the students using less adaptive strategies. Overall, these findings help to develop educational and mental health promoting initiatives, contributing to students coping ability,

depending on the stress level. Future research could examine the link of high academic stress to frequent use of worry and punishment and the extent to which these strategies are effective in a variety of contexts and diverse student populations.

CONCLUSION

The study identified the utility of strategies for thought control namely distraction, social control, worry, reappraisal and punishment in response to varying levels of academic stress ranging from low to high. It was found that amongst the strategies - worry and punishment play a significant role in relation to varied level of academic stress consistent with the findings that extreme dependency upon punishment, and worry thought-control strategies, were present due to students contemplating the need for excessive demand to cope immediately with the current stressor, since both provide a temporary repose to the stress faced by students (Barbayannis et al., 2022b). Further, the usage of strategies of thought control which are social, control, distraction and reappraisal did not vary significantly with different levels of academic stress indicating the complexity and individual differences in response to academic stressors which might have been influenced by several mediators that were not measured by this study. It is imperative to note that more than half of students have a moderate or high level of stress necessitating the need to consider the early identification in response to academic stress, since high stress contributes to the strengthening of less adaptive strategies as observed with respect to the sample of our study. Future research can take into other aspects of stress broadening the understanding the effect of general stressors affecting the dynamic interaction among the usage of various strategies of thought control and in specific identify the relationship and mediating variables which supports frequent use of punishment and worry in response to high academic stress in a variety of contexts and diverse student populations. Extending upon the real-world applicability of this study findings, it serves as a precursor for future therapeutic interventions, planning and assessments from educational perspective to focus on the extensive use of punishment and worry as strategies of thought control in order to deal with the demands of high academic stress. Additionally, on-campus mental health services may focus on implementing and designing intervention programs that target college students' resilience by minimizing the use of negative thought control techniques and adopting positive resilience strategies instead of punishment and worry. Overall, this study shows how students control their thoughts when faced with academic pressure and lay the groundwork for further studies on enhancing coping mechanisms. Educational institutions and mental health practitioners have a critical role in developing healthy reactions to stress due to academics and improving the subjective well-being of students.

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