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Research Paper

Exploring Perceived Stress and Academic Adjustment Among University Students: A Comparative Analysis between Day Scholars and Hostellers

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ABSTRACT

University students encounter various social, emotional, and academic obstacles that affect their stress levels and ability to acclimate to school. The living situation may impact these elements, especially if they are a day scholar or a hosteller. In this study, the researcher aimed to compare perceived stress and academic adjustment between day scholars and hostellers among Greater Noida (NCR region) university students. They conducted a quantitative study on 120 university students in Greater Noida (NCR region) (60 day scholars and 60 hostellers) who were between the ages of 18 to 25 years, in which 21.66% of male participants and 78.3% of female participants participated in the study and were assessed on a socio-demographic sheet using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) (Cohen et al., 1983) and Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ-28) (Baker & Siryk, 1989). They analysed the data by using the Mann-Whitney U test. Results revealed that day scholars and hostellers did not significantly differ in perceived stress ($p = 0.463$). On the other hand, day scholars scored higher ($p < 0.001$) in academic adjustment, indicating a significant difference with hostellers. While both groups experience similar amounts of stress, day scholars show superior academic adjustment. Residential status has a greater impact on adjustment than stress.

Keywords: *Perceived Stress, Academic Adjustment, Day Scholars, Hostellers, University Students, Residential Status*

Beginning university is a moment that requires both adjustment and change simultaneously, and stress is a product of adaptation during this transitional period (Derogatis & Coons 1993). The diversity within the university creates a complex and dynamic environment where they must learn to navigate and adapt to various events, responsibilities, choices, problems, and decisions (Kerr et al., 2004). University life entails greater responsibility, and some students may question their ability to succeed, potentially hindering their academic performance and increasing their stress levels (Dwyer & Cummings, 2001). In which individuals employ two types of cognitive appraisal: primary appraisal, which involves evaluating the threat level of a situation (irrelevant, benign, etc.), and secondary appraisal, which assesses available resources for managing stressful circumstances (e.g., controlling impulsivity, seeking additional information). These two

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events are explained by a model that is known as the transactional model of stress, which was developed by Lazarus and Folkman (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). From choosing a kid's name to determining whether the youngster should be exposed to the life of a day scholar or a hosteller, parents must make several decisions during the child's childhood. Hostellers spend their days bound by the rules and regulations of their teachers and, eventually, the warden, whereas day students are free to live an autonomous life, governed by their parents after school hours. While both groups have restricted access to numerous technologies, it is frequently only when they return home. Since the hostellers' peer group turns into their real family, with whom they spend their hours, this may also impact their relationships with their peers. This is not the case for day scholars. The students' chosen eating and sleeping patterns are also part of their varied lifestyle development (Karmakar et al., 2019). Several studies have explored the role of day scholars and hostellers study by Rasool, S. G., et al., (2022) aimed to compare the academic achievement and nutritional state of day scholars and hostellers of Lahore's allied health science students. The findings indicated that the academic performance of hostel students was slightly above that of day scholars and that the health status of day scholars was higher than that of hostel students. Rawat, L., and Bhatt, R. (2022) assessed and compared the psychological well-being of students in several groups—male and female, day students and hostellers, and Hindi and English-medium. According to the results, male students are generally happier than female students, and Hindi-medium students are happier than English-medium students. However, there is no difference in the well-being of day scholars and hostellers.

The Framework of Adjustment

The process of academic adjustment is complicated and involves many considerations, such as students' motivation, learning capacity, understanding of their academic objectives, strategies for accomplishing them, degree of contentment with the academic setting, and more (Baker & Siryk, 1984a, b). A successful transition into society and the ability to deal with the complicated stress and conflict that come with college life constructively and reasonably depend on their ability to adapt to college life. The transition to college life with its new demands is a crucial developmental stage that has to be addressed: stress negatively impacts adjustment, and the college student is a potential stressor in and of themselves (Moon, W. H., & Sim, H. S., 2015). The college environment's physical, social, and psychological aspects have been linked to student dropout rates (Credé, M., & Niehorster, S., 2012). Several studies have explored the role of adjustment study by Truskauskaite-Kuneviciene, I., et al., (2022) investigated how positive mental health (PMH) can prevent the onset of signs of adjustment disorder in young adults who are exposed to stressors in their lives. The findings showed that lower levels of PMH and SWB were associated with having experienced higher life stressors throughout the previous 12 months. However, there was a significant correlation between lower levels of adjustment disorder symptoms and higher levels of PMH, but not SWB. Another study by Hako, A. N., et al., (2025), the purpose of the study was to learn about the psychological adjustment difficulties faced by first-year university students, how these difficulties impacted their academic performance, and the methods they used to get past these difficulties. According to the findings, students had trouble focusing, had trouble contributing to class discussions, frequently forgot things, saw a drop in their academic performance, were unhappy in class, missed courses, and had memory loss. According to the thematic results, first-year students' academic achievement and psychological adjustment were significantly influenced by each other.

Perceived Stress

The idea of perceived stress is more complex than this explanation, which includes students' internal thoughts, their level of contentment with their college experience and friendships, and their capacity to cope with stressful situations. Each student experiences stress differently. Rather than a real change in the stress level, this discrepancy can result from completely different perceptions of the stressful event or stressor. An imbalance between expectations and resources can cause stress, or when pressure surpasses one's perceived ability to cope (Folkman, S., 1984). Perceived stress refers to "the extent to which one's life circumstances can be regarded as distressing" (Cohen et al., 1983). However, the impact of perceived stress on mental health is diverse and dependent on both internal and external personal resources, including social support and coping skills. (Alharbi, E., & Smith, A., 2018). Several studies have explored the role of perceived stress study by Olowodunoye, S. A., and Irewole, A. (2022) investigated how emotional intelligence affected the relationship between undergraduate students' educational performance and perceived stress in Ondo State. The results showed that emotional intelligence is a significant factor that can lessen the detrimental effects of perceived stress on undergraduates' academic adjustment. Srivastava, R., et al., (2020) assess how stressed out undergraduate dental students feel, where stress comes from, and how perceived stress relates to different stressors and sociodemographic traits. The study found that the average score for perceived stress was 30.25 ± 1.914.30 was the median perceived stress score. $P < 0.001$ indicates statistical significance. Öztürk, A. (2020) investigates the connection between academic grade average, perceived stress, and degree of university adaptation. The study's results indicated that perceived stress and university adjustment levels have a statistically significant negative connection ($r = -0.46$, $p < 0.01$). Students felt stress and their academic grade point averages and university adjustment did not significantly correlate ($p > 0.05$).

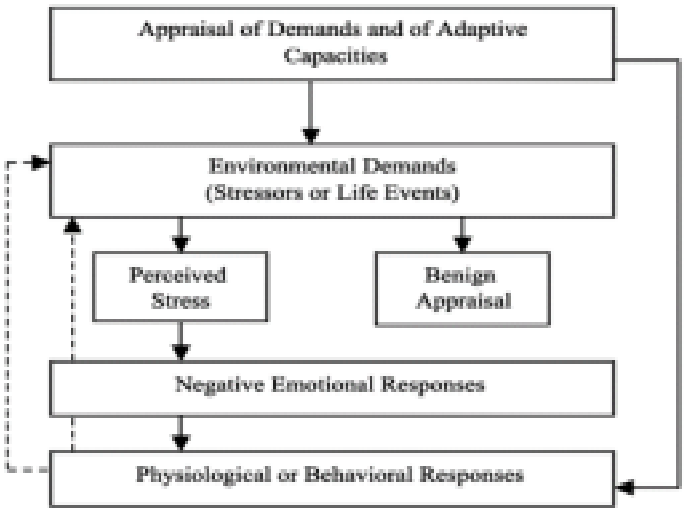

Figure No.1: A basic model of how life experiences and environmental pressures, or stressors, cause a multi-stage "stress response." (Source: Adapted by Cohen et al., 1997)

Cohen et al. (1997) provide a basic concept of the multi-stage "stress response" brought on by life experiences and environmental stresses. An evaluation of the stressors' potential for harm catalyses this reaction, which in turn influences behavioural, physiological, and psychological responses. A crucial aspect of this process is the difference between the types of stress in a person's surroundings and how those stressors are perceived to impose

demands. However, the limited studies have examined the perceived stress and academic adjustment among Greater Noida region (NCR) university students, comparing differences between day scholars and hostellers. The significance of this research lies in its potential to inform or provide insights into student well-being and institutional support techniques that are specifically tailored to both groups.

METHODOLOGY

Aim:

The Researcher aimed to assess university students' perceived stress and adjustment levels among day scholars and hostellers.

Objectives:

- To examine the perceived stress and academic adjustment among university students
- To assess the levels of perceived stress among university students who are day scholars and hostellers.
- To evaluate the academic adjustment of day scholars and hostellers in a university setting.
- To identify coping mechanisms commonly used by day scholars and hostellers in managing academic stress.

Hypotheses

Based on the discussion above, this study suggests the following hypotheses as follows:

- **H1:** There will be a significant difference between perceived stress in day scholars and hostellers.
- **H2:** There will be a significant difference between academic adjustment in day scholars and hostellers.

Sample

The researcher conducted study on 120 participants aged between 18 to 25 university students from both day scholar and hosteller categories, of which 60 are day scholars and 60 are hostellers.

Variable

- **Independent Variable:** Type of residence (Day Scholar vs. Hosteller).
- **Dependent Variables:** Perceived stress and adjustment level.

Tools Used:

1. **Perceived stress scale (PSS-10):** It was created by Cohen et al. (1983) to assess perceived stress among university students, specifically comparing day scholars and those residing in hostels. The PSS-10 focuses on evaluating how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming individuals perceive their lives to be. The items inquire about participants' emotions and thoughts over the preceding month, asking how frequently they experienced certain feelings. Responses are recorded on a five-point Likert scale ranging from 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). To calculate the total score, responses to the four positively phrased items (items 4, 5, 7, and 8) are reverse-scored (i.e., 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, 4=0), and then all items are summed. The total score ranges from 0 to 40, with scores categorised as low (0–13), moderate (14–26), and high (27–40) perceived stress. The PSS-10 has demonstrated good internal

consistency, with Cronbach's alpha values ranging from 0.75 to 0.91. It also exhibits acceptable test-retest reliability, with correlation coefficients ranging from 0.55 (over six weeks) to 0.61 (over twelve months), along with adequate construct validity. (Cohen, S., & Williamson, G., 1988; Cohn et al., 1983; Glaser, R., et al., 1999; Cole, S. R. 1999).

2. **Academic adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ-28):** The AAQ-28 is an adapted and shortened version of the Hebrew modified version of the Students Adaptation to College Questionnaire (SACQ) developed by Baker & Siryk 1989). It aimed to measure the Academic Adjustment of university students (Day scholars and hostellers). It contains 28 items and four subscales. The suitability of every object is assessed on a nine-point Likert scale from "Suits me very lot" (1) to "Does not suit me at all" (9). The following four facets of university adjusting are assessed: Academic Adjustment assesses a freshman's ability to satisfy educational demands at university. This facet contains six items (item numbers: 2, 8, 15, 19, 21, 22). The Social Adjustment assessment assesses an individual's ability to cope with this facet and contains eight items (item numbers: 3, 5, 7, 11, 16, 20, 24, 25). Personal-emotional adjustment assesses a student's mental or physical suffering this facet contains seven items (item number: 1, 4, 9, 12, 14, 17, 26), whereas Institutional Attachment assesses their commitment to the university this facet contains seven items (item number: 6, 10, 13, 18, 23, 27, 28). Reliability scores for the AAQ have an overall high of .86, and for the four subscales: academic .61; social.78; personal emotional .85, and institutional .77. A full-scale score, which is an indicator of the overall adjustment to university life, is produced by adding the four scales mentioned above. Half of the 28 items—1, 4, 9, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 20, 21, 22, and 26—were reversely scored, and the total score range is 28–252.

Procedure:

The researcher used the purposive sampling technique, which intends to examine significant differences by collecting data from participants in Greater Noida (NCR region). Data were gathered from 120 individuals aged 18 to 25, categorised as university students, selected using a purposive sampling technique. For the research, data were collected via Google Forms and physical questionnaires were distributed to the participants. Informed consent was obtained, ensuring that the data would be used for research purposes and kept confidential, giving participants the option to withdraw from the study at any time. The instructions for the research are straightforward; they explain the researcher's aim before obtaining consent. After consenting, participants completed a socio-demographic proforma, followed by protocols concerning the study variables. The scales used for the research include the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) to assess participants' perceived stress and the Academic Adjustment Questionnaire (AAQ-28) to evaluate academic adjustment. If participants have any questions or concerns about the research at any time, they are welcome to email the researcher at the address provided in the Google Form. After completing their participation, the researcher thanks the participants for their valuable time and contribution to the study. A quantitative, comparative research design to evaluate perceived stress and academic adaptation among university students based on their residential status. It employs structured self-report questionnaires to collect data.

RESULTS

The researcher used descriptive and inferential statistics to analyse and obtain the results. They applied a Comparative analysis Mann-Whitney U-test applied to identify the

significant differences between the stress and adjustment levels among the two groups of students (day scholars and hostellers).

Table No. 1: Socio-demographic status of the participants

Demographic Profile	Sub category	Frequency	Percentage
Age	18	3	2.5
	19	9	7.5
	20	18	15
	21	26	21.6
	22	36	30
	23	17	14.16
	24	10	8.3
	25	2	1.66
Sex	Male	26	21.66
	Female	94	78.3
Type of Residence	Day scholars	60	50
	Hostellers	60	50
Educational qualification	Undergraduate	47	39.16
	Postgraduate	73	60.8

The above table depicts the socio-demographic details of the university students. Participants in the sample's socio-demographic profile (N = 120) ranged in age from 18 to 25. The age group of 22 years old had the highest percentage (30%), followed by 21 years old (21.6%), 20 years old (15%), 23 years old (14.16%), and 24 years old (8.3%). The distribution of genders was noticeably skewed, with 26 men (21.6%) and 94 women (78.3%). The sample was equally split by residence status, with 60 individuals from the hosteller and day scholar groups (50% each). In terms of educational background, postgraduates made up a larger proportion of participants (73, 60.8%) than undergraduates (47; 39.16%).

Table No.2: Descriptive Statistics and Mann-Whitney U Test Showing P-values for Differences in PSS and AAQ between Day Scholars and Hostellers.

Variable	Group	N	Mean	Median	P- Value
Perceived stress	Day scholar	60	19.2	20.0	0.463
	Hosteller	60	17.9	20.0	
Academic adjustment	Day scholar	60	132.5	134.0	<.001
	Hosteller	60	122.1	122.5	

The above table depicts the P-value, mean, and median of variables and shows the comparison between variables (day scholars and hostellers) among the university students. In the perceived stress (PSS) between day scholars and hostellers, the mean (19.2 for day scholars and 17.9 for hostellers), median (20.0 for day scholars and hostellers) and P value (0.463) which is greater than 0.05, indicate no statistically significant difference in perceived stress between day scholars and hostellers. This means the researcher fails to reject the null hypothesis, which depicts that perceived stress among both groups are similar. In Academic adjustment (AAQ) between day scholars and hostellers, the mean (132.5 of day scholars and 122.1 of hostellers), median (134 of day scholars and 122.5 of hostellers), and P-value (<.001), which is less than 0.001, mean the difference in academic adjustment scores

between day scholars and hostellers is statistically significant, which means researcher Reject the null hypothesis, which depicts that there is a significant difference in academic adjustment, with day scholars adjusting better academically than hostellers. The mean difference in AAQ score depicts day scholars scoring higher in adjustment as compared to hostellers.

DISCUSSION

The Researcher aimed to assess university students' perceived stress and adjustment levels among day scholars and hostellers, comparing differences between day scholars and hostellers. They used Standardised questionnaires to measure perceived stress by using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). To evaluate the comparison between day scholars and hostellers in perceived stress and academic adjustment, data were examined using the Mann-Whitney U Test among university students. They hypothesised that perceived stress and academic adjustment would significantly differ between students who stay at home and those who live away from home. The first hypothesis examined, "There will be a significant difference between perceived stress in day scholars and hostellers," which measures the significant difference between variables. Researchers found no statistically significant difference in perceived stress between day scholars and hostellers. ($M=19.2$; $M=17.9$ & $p=0.463$). Hence, the hypothesis claims both groups experience a similar level of stress, regardless of a variety of influencing factors like social support, financial concerns, personal habits, or academic pressure. It implies that felt stress is not significantly influenced by living arrangements. The reason could be that the academic pressures that both groups must deal with—such as tests, deadlines, and competitive grading, are the main cause of stress for college students. As a result, stress levels might not change whether a student lives at home or in a hostel. Both groups are particularly affected by academic pressure and familial expectations in collectivist cultures like India. This cultural element may reduce the impact of residential inequalities by establishing a common baseline of stress, as suggested by Nagle & Sharma (2018). Similar results have also been found in research by Meenakshisundaram et al. (2010), which indicates a comparatively high degree of stress among students in business school. Male students are more stressed than those who are female. There were no significant variations in stress detected based on factors such as hostel stay, travel model, daily travel time, or school study medium. Strict discipline and workload were the main sources of stress. Other research also found similar results by Kumar (2021). The findings indicate that, when taking the course into account, there was a significant difference in the mean mental health ratings between professional and non-professional students, according to an independent t-test. While there was no significant difference in the mean mental health scores of professional students with account of gender and residence, there was a significant difference in the mental health scores of non-professional students when residence and gender were taken into account, according to the independent t-test. Contrary to this finding, another study shows a significant difference by Narang & Jahan (2019). Stress, well-being, and sleep disturbance were shown to be significantly correlated ($p<.05$). Additionally, there was a significant difference ($p<.01$) in stress, well-being, and sleep disturbance between students who were hostellers and those who were not. While hostellers' levels of well-being were high, they also had significant levels of stress and sleep disturbance among those who were not hostellers. Stress and sleep disturbance were shown to be positively correlated, while well-being and stress and sleep disturbance were found to be negatively correlated. The second hypothesis, "There will be a significant difference between Academic adjustment in day scholars and hostellers," measures the significant difference between variables. Researchers found a statistically

significant difference in Academic adjustment between day scholars and hostellers (M=132.5;122.1 & p <0.01). Hence, the hypothesis claims both groups experience a different level of significant difference in academic adjustment, with day scholars adjusting better academically than hostellers. Marwaha, Swargiary and Roy; Kavad and Jansari in (2015; 2023; 2019) suggested that felt stress is significantly influenced by living arrangements. The reason could be living with their families; day scholars typically receive direct emotional, practical, and occasionally intellectual support (e.g., encouragement, regular meals, and time management assistance). Study motivation and focus can be improved by a stable home environment. Resources that aid in academic transition, such as personal study areas, home internet, and consistent routines, are frequently available to day scholars. Disruptions to internet connectivity, noisy surroundings, or an absence of individualised academic resources can all have an impact on hostellers' study habits. Similar studies by Gupta (2020) had the same results; the findings indicated that the social and emotional adjustment of day scholars and hostellers differed significantly. The social and emotional adjustment of day scholars is superior to that of hostellers. Comparing day scholars by gender revealed that they had good emotional, home, and general adjustment. Girls who were day scholars adjusted well overall. The hostel boys' emotional and social adjustment levels were adequate. The emotional adjustment and health of the hosteller girls were satisfactory. Overall adjustment for both hosteller boys and girls is quite satisfactory. The social and emotional adjustment of day scholars and hostellers differed significantly. The social and emotional adjustment of day scholars is superior to that of hostellers. Comparing day scholars by gender revealed that they had good emotional, home, and general adjustment. Girls who were day scholars adjusted well overall. The hostel boys' emotional and social adjustment levels were adequate. The emotional adjustment and health of the hosteller girls were satisfactory. Overall adjustment for both hosteller boys and girls is quite satisfactory. Another study found similar results by Marwaha, S. (2015). Six phases were used to compare these groups' levels of adjustment. Day Scholar Boys and Hosteller Boys have been compared in the first phase. The second step included comparing the adjustment levels of Hosteller Girls with Day Scholar Girls. In the third phase, all boys and girls were compared. In the fourth phase, Hostellers and All-Day Scholars were contrasted. The fifth phase contrasted Day Scholar Boys and Day Scholar Girls, and the final phase compared the adjustment levels of Hosteller Boys and Hosteller Girls. Reports indicate that Day Scholars fared better than Hostellers, and that girls were significantly more adjusted in the home area than boys were, though only marginally in other areas.

CONCLUSION

Researcher found that while perceived stress levels are similar between day scholars and hostellers, academic adjustment varies dramatically, with day scholars demonstrating more adaptability. This shows that housing circumstances influence how individuals adjust academically, but may not affect their stress levels. Furthermore, during this investigation, it summarises how institutions may explore giving targeted support programs to improve transition abilities, particularly for hostellers, while also providing stress management services to all students**.**

Future Implication

The findings suggest the need for targeted support services in universities that address stress management and academic adjustment, irrespective of students' residential status, as both groups showed comparable stress levels but differences in adjustment. It should aim to incorporate a larger and more diverse sample across multiple universities and regions to

enhance generalizability. Employing longitudinal designs can provide deeper insights into how perceived stress and academic adjustment evolve over time and whether living arrangements have lasting effects.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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