

Research Paper

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

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ABSTRACT

Shillong is a city with a steady increase in traffic congestion and roadblocks that can last up to hours making commuting a difficult business. Our study seeks to show the impact of traffic congestion on students' mental health. Our study was conducted on a sample of 297 students of which 80 were male students and 217 were female students belonging to the age group of 13-19, who commute to schools located in the most traffic-prone location in the city which are in Mawkhar and Laitumkhrah respectively. The tools used include The Perceived Stress Scale, The Psychological Well-being Scale, and a Coping Scale. An interview method was also used to ascertain feedback and explore the students' experiences. Our findings from the Perceived Stress Scale show that 17.2% of students have high perceived stress, 75.1% have moderate stress, and 7.7% have low stress. Findings from the Psychological Well-being Scale show that 98.0% of students have moderate psychological well-being and 2.0% have high psychological well-being. The Coping Scale findings show that 6.4% of students have low levels of coping, 69.7% have moderate coping, and 23.9% have high coping. Qualitative findings indicate that traffic stress affects the students' moods and attitudes towards others.

Keywords: *Stress, Traffic Congestion, Coping Strategies, School students, Psychological Well-being*

Shillong is the capital city of Meghalaya, often referred to as 'The Scotland of the East' (Traveltrends, 2021). It is known for its scenic beauty and is regarded as an educational destination (TNN, 2011). However, alongside its vibrant lifestyle, the city grapples with a growing and escalating phenomenon that has made living in the city a challenging and daunting experience. Mental health is one of the most important aspects of well-being and should be addressed openly starting with young students who travel quite a bit to get to school. Students have a lot of responsibility as they strive to do well in all aspects of their lives, however, since commuting to school is one of the most common daily routines they encounter, the stress caused by traffic congestion affects their overall well-being. Students are unaware of the stress caused by traffic and often feel helpless and demotivated (Rellon, et al., 2024). Staying stuck and cramped up in a small space for long

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Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

hours is sure to have some effect on the mental health of the students, which will further impact their quality of life. Apart from people commuting to and from work daily students are also widely affected by traffic congestion and our study focuses on this group.

Traffic Congestion – Definition, prevalence, and causes.

Traffic congestion is defined as a condition in which vehicles are delayed beyond normal travel times due to the high volume of traffic on a roadway due to the number of vehicles trying to use a road exceeds the design capacity of the traffic network to handle it (Weisbrod, Vary & Treyz, 2003).

Traffic congestion is a phenomenon that is commonly seen on a global scale. According to Chandler-Wilde, (2023), traffic congestion is so common that a report by INRIX research found that 42% of urban areas had more congestion than before the pandemic in Europe and 39% in the US with the UK coming in at 72%. This shows us just how prevalent traffic congestion is on a global scale. In a review study by Kumar, Kumar & Das, (2021) India ranks 1st in the number of road accident deaths. After carefully exploring the measures of traffic congestion and different studies from international and national sides, the findings show that traffic congestion can be mitigated to some extent.

Fattah, Morshed, Morshed, Haque, and Haque (2021) found that pedestrians randomly crossing the road at any place cause traffic congestion and uncontrolled pedestrian movements impact traffic accidents.

Effects of Traffic Congestion

Global studies have shown that traffic congestion affects the air quality of a particular city, and the level of stress, which in turn affects the quality of life. According to an article by Zeng & Batterman, (2013) pollutant emissions have increased and degraded air quality especially near roadways as a result of the increased severity and duration of traffic congestion. The study also shows that lower vehicle speeds as a result of traffic congestion can increase pollutant concentration on the roads. Traffic Congestion can also lead to changes in driving patterns leading to increased speedups, slowdowns stops, and starts, and as a result, increased emissions compared to normal conditions.

Hennesy and Weisenthal, (1997) found that driving in highly congested traffic areas resulted in higher levels of stress compared to driving in low congested traffic areas. The study consisted of a sample of 27 York University students and 13 people who worked in the North York Community near York University.

Haider, Kerr, and Badami, (2013) showed that workers who experience traffic congestion more than three times a week report higher levels of stress than those who experience infrequent congestion. Those with longer commutes report higher levels of stress than those with shorter commutes and those who were satisfied with their commutes were least likely to be stressed. The study also showed that the duration of commute time that is over an hour is directly related to stress. The results also show that exposure to frequent traffic congestion is associated with a higher level of stress.

Sunyer, (2015) showed that children who attended schools located near a highly congested place showed lower cognitive development growth than children whose schools were near a low congested place.

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

Traffic congestion and stress

A study by Rasmussen, (2000) examined driving-induced stress among urban college student commuters in Las Vegas. 407 students with the age range of 18-51, the mean being 23.3 years, were surveyed about their experiences with stress induced by commuting to college. Stress was assessed using a standard stress scale. The study has found that daily commuting by automobile was an identified source of stress for most participants, although the stress appeared no greater than that induced by examinations in college courses. 75.8% of the participants said drivers were found to be more aggressive and dangerous than they were five years ago. Gee, (2003) showed that Perceived traffic stress is associated with general health status and depression. It was found that persons reporting traffic stress had lower health status and more depressive symptoms. People who live in areas with greater vehicular burden and who reported the most traffic stress are the ones who also had the lowest health status and the most depressive symptoms. Therefore, traffic stress may represent an important factor that influences the well-being of urban populations. (Gee, 2004)

Local and Indian Studies

A study by Rajbongshi,(2020) aimed to investigate the impacts of traffic congestion on private individuals, taxi drivers, and businessmen. It is shown that traffic congestion impacts private car owners, taxi drivers, and businessmen through a reduction in the number of taxi trips made, an increase in travel time for identical distances, a rise in fuel expenditure, and a reduction in the net profit of taxi drivers. Another significant impact of traffic congestion is time loss in which students face the harsh consequences of it. It was revealed in personal interviews that traffic congestion has negative impacts on student's performance and mental state. However, this study does not go in-depth into the mental health aspect.

A study from Bangalore, India showed that traffic congestion causes stress which leads to frustration and incidents of road rage among bus drivers (S & G, 2014).

Research questions:

1. What are the impacts of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being of school students in Shillong?
2. What are the various coping mechanisms used by school students to cope with their stress?
3. How might the feedback and recommendations of school students help to improve traffic congestion?

Research objectives:

1. To identify the effects of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being and stress of school students in Shillong.
2. To determine the coping mechanisms used by school students to cope with stress.
3. To ascertain feedback and recommendations to improve and manage traffic congestion for healthy psychological well-being.

Significance of the study

The study can bring to the surface the obvious mental health tolls that high school students have about traffic congestion. It can bring awareness to other factors contributing to stress in high school students therefore shedding a new perspective on our approach to dealing and managing this stress. It can also bring to light the relationship between traffic congestion and

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

the mental health of students. By doing so it can show the general public the mental health effects of traffic congestion and bring the urgency that is needed to mitigate this issue.

METHODOLOGY

Areas of Study

The area of our study is Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar- Jaiaw Area, Shillong, East Khasi Hills District Meghalaya. The data is collected from different schools located in widely congested areas of Shillong, comprising of Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar-Jaiaw respectively.

Research Design

The research design used for our study adheres to mixed methods where quantitative and qualitative methods are employed in data collection.

Sampling Unit

The sampling unit was from school-going students in Shillong between the age of 13-19 years old who belong to schools located in the Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar area respectively. Classes of 8,9,10 & 12 were chosen for the study from both areas.

Inclusion Criteria:

1. Age group of 13-19 years old
2. Students who are studying in schools located in the Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar-Jaiaw areas.
3. Students who face traffic congestion.

Exclusion Criteria:

1. Students who do not go to schools located Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar-Jaiaw area.
2. Students who do not belong in the 13-19 age group.
3. Students who do not face traffic congestion.

Sampling size

The sample consisted of 297 students whose participation was voluntary.

Sampling Method

Sampling methods involve random sampling where the 5 schools from each area were chosen at random manually. However, the classes were selected using purposive sampling, the sample was chosen by choice focusing on adolescent students who experience traffic congestion.

Methods of Data Collection

For objective 1

The tools for data collection of Objective 1 was the Psychological Well-being Scale (PBWS) developed by Dr. Devendra Singh Sisodia and Ms. Pooja Choudhary, which was used to outline the effects of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being of school students in Shillong. The quantitative survey method was used with the help of random sampling to meet this objective.

Another scale named The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) was also used to find out the intensity of stress caused by traffic congestion among school students.

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

For objective 2

A Coping Scale by Hamby, Grych, & Banyard, 2013 Partially adapted from Holahan & Moos, 1987; Spitzberg & Copach, 2008 was used to determine the level of coping used by school students to cope with traffic stress.

For objectives 3

For feedback and recommendations, a list of 11 self-designed questionnaires was used and an interview was conducted to ascertain feedback and recommendations to improve and manage traffic congestion for healthy psychological well-being. The sample size includes 15 students who consent to the interview.

The interview was conducted in the school premises and for some of the students, a phone interview was conducted with the consent of the students and parents.

Data Analysis

The quantitative data was analysed using an Excel sheet and IBM SPSS Statistics 23 and thematic analysis was used for the qualitative data drawing out common themes from the data gathered.

Ethical consideration

The research commences only after getting permission from the Directorate of School Education and Literacy. Informed consent was sought from the schools and parents before the commencement of the data collection. The participants in this research project are voluntary and the students were given the freedom to withdraw at any point in time. For analysis, a code was assigned for classification, and confidentiality and anonymity were maintained.

In addition to that, permission to use standard questionnaires such as Psychological Well-being Tools, Perceived Stress Scale, and Coping Scale was asked from the respective owners and was utilized only after permission was granted.

Pilot Study

A pilot study was conducted and the sample size was 5 random strangers. The main objective of the pilot study was to check the relevance of the self-designed questionnaire to the research topic. The pilot study was conducted successfully, the respondents were satisfied with the questions and therefore the questions were proceeded to the final interview.

RESULTS

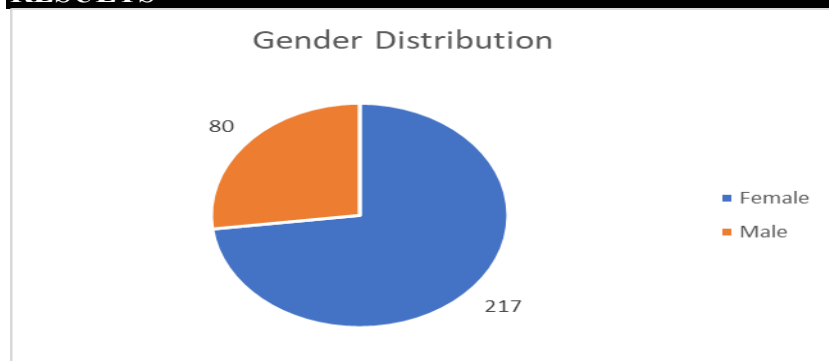


Figure 1 Depicts the gender distribution of the sample.

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

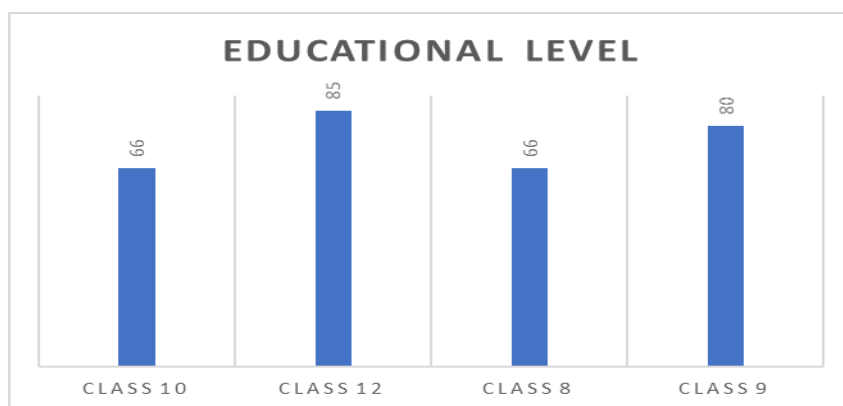


Figure 2 Depicting the educational level of respondents.

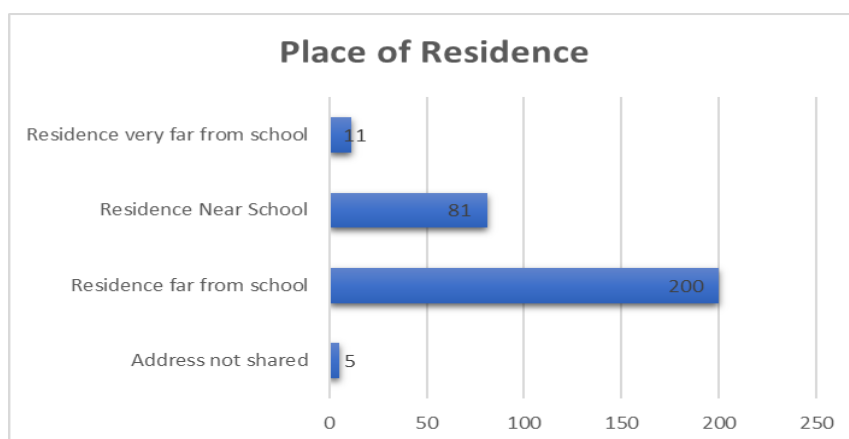


Figure 3 Depicting place of residence.

Table 1. Socio-demographic profile of the students who sat for the interview (Laitumkhras Area).

Respondent	Class	Gender
R-1	12	Male
R-2	9	Female
R-3	9	Female
R-4	12	Male
R-5	12	Male
R-6	12	Male
R-7	12	Male
R-8	9	Female
R-9	9	Female
R-10	9	Female

Table 2. Socio-demographic profile of the students who sat for the interview (Mawkhar area)

Respondent	Class	Gender
R-1	12	Female
R-2	12	Female
R-3	12	Female
R-4	10	Female
R-5	10	Female

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

Experience of traffic congestion in Shillong

Table 3 Questionnaire findings of Perceived stress scale with place of residence depicting the increase in stress as the distance of residence from school increases

Place of residence. * Perceived stress scale (PSS) * School Area Crosstabulation

School Area				Perceived stress scale (PSS)		
				Low Perceive stress	Moderate Perceive Stress	High Perceive Stress
Laitumkhrah Area	Place of residence.	Near School area	Count	3	44	5
			% of Total	1.7%	24.3%	2.8%
	Far from School area	Count	10	84	30	
		% of Total	5.5%	46.4%	16.6%	
	Very far from school area	Count	0	3	2	
		% of Total	0.0%	1.7%	1.1%	
	Total		Count	13	131	37
		% of Total	7.2%	72.4%	20.4%	
Mawkhar Area	Place of residence.	Near School area	Count	4	22	3
			% of Total	3.4%	19.0%	2.6%
	Far from School area	Count	6	65	10	
		% of Total	5.2%	56.0%	8.6%	
	Very far from school area	Count	0	5	1	
		% of Total	0.0%	4.3%	0.9%	
	Total		Count	10	92	14
		% of Total	8.6%	79.3%	12.1%	
Total	Place of residence.	Near School area	Count	7	66	8
			% of Total	2.4%	22.2%	2.7%
	Far from School area	Count	16	149	40	
		% of Total	5.4%	50.2%	13.5%	
	Very far from school area	Count	0	8	3	
		% of Total	0.0%	2.7%	1.0%	
	Total		Count	23	223	51
		% of Total	7.7%	75.1%	17.2%	

Haider, M., Kerr, K., and Badami, M., (2013) showed that those with longer commutes report higher levels of stress than those with shorter commutes and those who were satisfied with their commutes were least likely to be stressed. The study also showed that the duration of commute time that is over an hour is directly related to stress. Our findings also support this and indicate that the distance between the place of residence and the school plays a role in the stress experienced by school students who are commuting.

Hennessy, D. A. & Wiesenthal, D.L., (1997) found that driving in highly congested traffic areas resulted in higher levels of stress compared to driving in low congested traffic areas. In this study, many of the students experience high levels of stress upon commuting to school in highly congested areas. They express frustration about having to leave the car and walk to their school. Some of them are carrying heavy bags which makes them more exhausted.

“Sometimes, here in Shillong traffic, it lasts for hours. Let’s say to get from point A to point B it takes just 20 minutes. Now, if there is traffic it takes an hour and a half, maybe an hour and a maximum 2 half” (R1, Male, 3rd May 2024).

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

“Today itself, like I had to walk from the Shillong college because of the traffic and I come from cars so it was tiring carrying the bag and my school bag and...”(R-3, Female, 13th, May 2024).

Prevalence of traffic congestion among school students

According to Ganesh, (2019) study on traffic and mental health bus, truck, auto-rickshaw, and cab drivers are disproportionately affected by traffic and long commutes with no proper way of dealing with traffic stress causing results in anger. Based on the data collected from the interview some students can be seen addressing the causes of traffic and the role of driver’s attitudes and roadblocks. They showed their dissatisfaction with the management of the traffic system which is causing them stress while commuting to school.

“The spaces here are very narrow along with the scooters, bikes, just scooters and bikes are scarier to me because I can’t tell where they’re going to turn whether they’re going to use the correct direction, turn signals, they don’t do that sometimes so I almost collide”. (R-4, Male, 3rd May, 2024).

“The only thing I would like to say is that there are more cars and it caused traffic and some of the drivers are so rude. They don't let others come, like they just rush and not allow people to cross the road” R-5, Female, 31st May 2024.

Impact of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being of school students

A study by Rasmussen, C., Knapp, T. J. & Garner, L., (2000) examined driving-induced stress among urban college student commuters in Las Vegas. 407 students with the age range of 18-51, the mean being 23.3 years, were surveyed about their experiences with stress induced by commuting to college. Stress was assessed using a standard stress scale. The study has found that daily commuting by automobile was an identified source of stress for most participants, although the stress appeared no greater than that induced by examinations in college courses.

Table 4 Findings on the Psychological Well-Being Scale showing moderate psychological well-being for 291 students.

Perceived stress scale (PSS) * Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS) Crosstabulation			Psychological Wellbeing Scale (PWBS)		Total
			Moderate	High	
Perceived stress scale (PSS)	Low Perceive stress	Count	23	0	23
		% of Total	7.7%	0.0%	7.7%
	Moderate Perceive Stress	Count	218	5	223
		% of Total	73.4%	1.7%	75.1%
	High Perceive Stress	Count	50	1	51
		% of Total	16.8%	0.3%	17.2%
Total	Count	291	6	297	
	% of Total	98.0%	2.0%	100.0%	

In the study that we conducted where school students were examined instead of urban college students to explore the impact of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being of school students, there was evidence of students experiencing psychological stress including their attitudes towards themselves and others, However, their Psychological well-

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

being lies within the normal range of moderate this still shows that there is room for improvement.

“It's like I cannot sit still. I was filled with frustration. I want to get out but the school is still far, especially during exam season it's extremely hard due to traffic congestion.” (R-1, Female, 10th May, 2024).

“As a student it's really stressful, When I get home its rush and rush we need to complete our studies homework's and then it affects my moods and feelings as in I get really stressful like in a bad mood always in a bad mood and it's not good” (R-10, Female, 13th May 2024).

“Towards anybody that talks to me, I become more emotionally swayed, mostly by anger or I become more easily irritable.” (R-4, Male, 3rd May 2024).

These are some of the significant statements provided by the students. Their psychological well-being is disturbed causing irritation, frustration, and, anger.

Coping strategies

Table 5 Findings on the Coping Scale and Perceived Stress Scale showing the levels of coping among the students with 69.7% having moderate level of coping.

Perceived stress scale (PSS) Coping Scale (CS) Crosstabulation						
			Coping Scale (CS)			Total
			Low	Moderate	High	
Perceived stress scale (PSS)	Low Perceive stress	Count	1	18	4	23
		% of Total	0.3%	6.1%	1.3%	7.7%
	Moderate Perceive Stress	Count	15	153	55	223
		% of Total	5.1%	51.5%	18.5%	75.1%
	High Perceive Stress	Count	3	36	12	51
		% of Total	1.0%	12.1%	4.0%	17.2%
Total		Count	19	207	71	297
		% of Total	6.4%	69.7%	23.9%	100.0%

According to our findings, we could see that some students struggle significantly when they are caught in traffic. However, most of the students were able to cope by using different strategies such as relaxation strategies or problem-solving focus strategies. While there were students who would keep their frustration to themselves as well.

“Mostly I just don't think about it. The main thing is not put much of over minds into it and just try to do a bit of breathing exercises.” (R-6, Male, 3rd May, 2024).

“If they are stuck in traffic or something important or they don't want to get scolding then it's better they if they know the time they should get down of the car and walk fast, Its good for our health too if we walk” (R-8, Female, 13th May, 2024).

“Sometimes I got angry. I just sit still and I just kept it to myself.” (R-1. Female, 10th May, 2024).

The students have different ways of coping with the stress when stuck in traffic. They were able to manage their stress by doing something or the other of their own interest.

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

A qualitative study by (TK Nagabharana, 2021) showed that the adolescents's way of coping included rationalizing and accepting the situation, distraction, spirituality, and self-comforting methods which were seen from the above statements.

Feedback on the importance of traffic congestion-related research works

The feedbacks here focus on the assessment of student's opinions on research-related works and the review paper. For some students, it seems very beneficial and helpful however for some of them they couldn't agree to accept research help improve traffic congestion. Some significant statements include

"Yes it does. Like it can... Like to get the opinion of others. Like to raise their voice especially students." (R-5, Female, 29th May, 2024).

"I believe, I would say that it's a state of 50:50. Because no matter how many like, let's just say, in the past year itself there have been more than 10 surveys I have participated in from different colleges as their projects, and even if we have this surveys and all, What will happen to this survey? It will be yes, it will be sent to the higher authorities, higher office, it will just be piled up because as we see now, there is nothing that can be done about Shillong traffic. Every day, people are buying new automobiles while the road is still the same size. So, I would say that this survey would, be the voice of the people so it's kind of showing the people how the citizens are being affected by traffic, so if this answer falls into the right hands that it will be a very good thing but if it doesn't fall into the right hand that it's just basically useless I would say." (R-1, Male, 3rd May, 2024).

Recommendation and feedback for proper management

To maintain a better management of traffic congestion problems, the students were asked to share ideas on how to tackle this problem. The students were leaning towards transportation-related problems by recommending to maintain law & order and make the traffic lights effective.

"I think not overtaking and also because the scooty drivers they are not provided proper place that they can walk through and this is the reason why traffic is always jam" (R-3, Female, 13th May, 2023)

"I think for this there should be traffic lights also because I think there's more accident because there's no traffic lights and also because of the scooties when there's a gap between cars. I think a lot of accidents happened because of traffic jam." (R-4, Female, 29th May, 2024).

DISCUSSION

The present study explores the impact of traffic congestion on the psychological well-being of school students in Shillong, their coping mechanisms, and potential recommendations for traffic management. The data collected from school students in Shillong, particularly those in congested areas like Laitumkhrah and Mawkhar, revealed a high prevalence of stress due to traffic congestion. This stress manifests in various forms, including frustration, anxiety, and mood disturbances.

The Psychological Well-Being Scale reveals that most of the respondents have relatively moderate psychological well-being. Quantitative data from the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) reveals that students residing far from school experienced more stress than those residing nearby. Data from the Coping Scale (CS) showed that 93.6% of the total respondents have moderate to high coping strategies signifying that while some students struggle significantly, many are able to manage their stress effectively through adaptive coping strategies. The

Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

coping mechanisms employed by the students varied, with some adopting adaptive strategies like relaxation exercises and problem-solving approaches, while others resorted to less effective methods such as internalizing their frustration. The students' preference for adaptive coping strategies like walking and deep breathing exercises demonstrates an awareness of effective stress management techniques. The feedback from the students provided valuable insights into the potential solutions for mitigating traffic congestion and its associated stress. Suggestions such as improving traffic management, improved public transportation and stricter enforcement of traffic laws.

While this study provides valuable insights into traffic congestion and how it affects students, it is also essential to acknowledge its limitations. The limitations include the sample size not representing the whole student population due to the imbalance between the male and female respondents and the limited representation of the demographic residential areas. Moreover, the study relies on self-reported data which might introduce bias over their reporting methods, as some might underreport or overreport. The short data collection period may not capture the full extent of traffic-related stress throughout the year. Furthermore, the lack of correlational data from other regions limits the generalizability of the findings. Future research could address these limitations by employing longitudinal designs and larger, more diverse samples. Additionally, comparative studies across different regions experiencing similar traffic issues could offer broader insights into effective traffic management strategies.

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Traffic Congestion: The Stress Experienced by School Students of Shillong

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Conflict of Interest

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