

The Dual Edges of the Academic Sword: Academic Resilience and Stress in Young Adults

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ABSTRACT

This study explores the intricate relationship between academic stress and academic resilience among young adults. Academic stress, characterized by pressure, anxiety, and competition, poses significant risks to students' mental health and academic outcomes. In contrast, academic resilience refers to students' capacity to adapt and thrive despite such challenges. This study was conducted with 100 participants from Kolkata and its surrounding areas. A purposive sampling technique was used. The dimensions of Academic Resilience have been measured using the Academic Resilience Scale-30 (Simon Cassidy, 2016), while Academic Stress has been measured using the Academic Stress Scale (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). Data analysis included descriptive statistics, Spearman's correlation, and the Kruskal-Wallis test. Results revealed a significant negative correlation between academic stress and resilience ($r = -0.378$, $p < 0.01$), indicating that higher resilience is associated with lower perceived stress. Additionally, significant differences in resilience scores were found across different stress levels, with those experiencing lower stress demonstrating notably higher resilience. These findings underscore the protective role of resilience against academic stress and highlight the need for interventions aimed at enhancing resilience to improve students' well-being and academic performance.

Keywords: *Academic Resilience, Academic Stress, Young Adults*

Academic stress and academic resilience are two critical constructs in psychology. Academic stress refers to the pressure and anxiety students experience due to academic demands, while academic resilience is the ability to adapt and thrive despite these challenges. Understanding the intercorrelation between these constructs is essential for developing effective interventions to support students. Academic stress is a prevalent issue among students, characterized by feelings of pressure, anxiety, and worry related to academic tasks such as exams, assignments, and competition. Elevated academic stress can adversely affect both the mental well-being of students and their academic achievements. Academic resilience is defined as the ability to navigate academic obstacles while sustaining strong performance and motivation. Students who exhibit resilience are more capable of managing stress and are more inclined to achieve academic success, even in the face of challenges. Research indicates a significant interrelationship between academic

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stress and resilience. Higher levels of academic resilience can mitigate the negative effects of academic stress. Resilient students tend to use effective coping strategies, maintain a positive outlook, and seek social support, which helps them manage stress more effectively. Several factors influence academic resilience, including personal traits such as self-efficacy and motivation, as well as external factors like social support from friends, family, and teachers. These factors can enhance students' ability to cope with academic stress and improve their overall well-being.

Understanding the intercorrelation between academic stress and resilience has important implications for educators and policymakers. Interventions such as resilience training programs and stress management workshops can help students develop the skills needed to manage stress and enhance their resilience. Creating a supportive learning environment is also crucial for fostering resilience among students.

Academic Stress

Academic stress occurs when a set of academic-related demands exceeds a student's existing capability to manage and adapt to these demands (Wilks, 2008). Academic stress refers to the emotional pressure that students experience, stemming from the mental or emotional strain caused by the challenging demands of academic life. According to Gadzella and Masten, there are two categories into which parts of academic stress can be separated: (a) academic stressors, which include feelings of irritation, involvement in the dispute, pressure, change, and self-imposed (self-imposed desire). (b) Responses to pressures in the classroom are divided into four groups: physiological or physical reactions, emotional or affective reactions, behavioral or behavioral reactions, and cognitive assessments. While moderate stress can improve attention, memory, and immunological function, prolonged or excessive stress affects both cognitive and immunological functions. Prolonged stress can make the hippocampus more vulnerable to injury, with rats exhibiting a reduction in hippocampal volume and memory deficits (Kim et al., 2006). Excess stress in short-term academic contexts, such as taking a high-stakes college admission test, might hinder information processing and execution (Beilock, 2008). Academic stress can also lead to unhealthy coping techniques, such as problematic smartphone use, especially among students with low levels of problem-focused coping (Xu et al., 2019). These directly lead to decreased academic achievement, which causes even more academic stress. Researchers have shown that academic stress is related to the students' academic achievement, retention, and graduation rates (Dang, 2007). The literature has also shown that the feeling of academic stress affects students socially, psychologically, and physically. So, students under high academic stress may feel that they may lose confidence, feel lonely, and experience mood swings or agitation (Dang, 2007). Also, severe psychological problems such as depression and anxiety may occur (Misra & McKean, 2000). Anxiety, according to de Botton (2005), "is the handmaiden of contemporary ambition." Competition-related perceptions among students and in the classroom also result in an extrinsic, performance-oriented approach to learning (Dweck, 2000), which has been connected to decreased motivation, a rise in procrastination, and a rise in academic dishonesty (Eccles & Wigfield, 2002; Senko, Durik, & Harackiewicz, 2008). Accordingly, anxiety and sadness may also be linked to perceived competition in college as a result of social comparisons over academic achievement.

Academic resilience

In the academic realm, resilience is a crucial motivational-affective component. Recent research has focused on unique psychological theories to alter learning behavior and reduce demotivation in language acquisition. According to Morales and Trotman (2004), academic

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resilience is the capacity to succeed academically in the face of obstacles and adversity. According to them, academic resilience is the dynamic process that successful academics use to get beyond the obstacles preventing their peers from reaching their goals (Morales and Trotman, 2004). Thus, academic resilience is defined as providing sufficient coping strategies to manage stress and anxiety that arise in the university setting and serving as an incentive for achieving academic and personal goals (Cassidy, 2016). According to Knight (2007), in educational environments, pointing out students' shortcomings in contrast to their struggles and making an effort to find answers are insufficient. He said that resilience researchers have drastically changed the way they work by helping people develop their strengths and by figuring out what influences how resilient students are to adversity in life. According to Krovetz (2008), individual behaviors, psychosocial circumstances, and sociocultural contexts all have an impact on resilience as a multifaceted developmental process.

METHODOLOGY

Objective

The objective of the present study was-

- To find out if there is any correlation between academic resilience and academic stress among young adults.
- To find out if there is a significant mean difference in academic resilience scores among the three levels of academic stress (high, moderate, and low levels).

Hypothesis

In the present study following hypotheses were used

- **Hypothesis 1:** There is a significant positive correlation between academic resilience and academic stress among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 2:** There is a significant negative correlation between academic resilience and academic stress among young adults.
- **Hypothesis 3:** There is no significant mean difference in academic resilience scores among the three levels of academic stress (high, moderate, and low levels).
- **Hypothesis 4:** There is a significant mean difference in academic resilience scores among the three levels of academic stress (high, moderate, and low levels).

Sample

The purposive sampling technique was used for the present study. A total number of 140 participants were approached, among whom 122 participants signed in consent form and filled up the questionnaire booklet. Out of 122, 18 participants did not return the questionnaire, and 4 participants (who belong to the school, aged between 18-24) submitted the filled-up questionnaire. From this pool of data, 100 usable data were selected for the present study. All the participants were selected from Kolkata and its surroundings.

Inclusion and exclusion criteria

Participants were selected based on the following inclusion and exclusion criteria.

Inclusion criteria:

- Age range above 18 – below 25
- Subjects should be college students
- Subjects must be from Kolkata and the surrounding suburban area
- Those who have an understanding of the English language
- Subjects who are non-working

Exclusion criteria:

- Those who have no understanding of the English language
- Subjects studying in non-recognized colleges and universities.
- Subjects suffering from psychological ailments.
- Subjects who are working
- Age range not between 18-25

The participants who were selected for the present study are referred to as “subjects” here.

Instruments

Three measures were used in this study,

1. **Demographic details:** An information schedule was used to gather demographic details – name, age, education qualification, type of residential area (urban/suburban/rural), type of family (nuclear/ extended/ joint/ broken-home), socio-economic status
2. **Perceptions of Academic Stress Scale (PAS):** This scale was developed by Dalia Bedewy and Adel Gabriel (2015), and is an 18-item scale that captures various aspects of academic stress. This is a self-administering test based on what participants have experienced during the past month. The items were divided into four subscales (Pressure to perform, Perception of workload and examination, Self-perception, and Time restraint). The developed instrument demonstrated internal consistency reliability with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.7. It is scored using a 5-point Likert-type scale from 1 (extremely irrelevant) to 5 (strongly relevant). The possible total scores thus range from 18 to 90, with higher scores indicating higher levels of perceived academic stress.
3. **Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30):** The Academic Resilience Scale (ARS-30) was developed by Simon Cassidy (2016). It is a multidimensional measure designed to evaluate students' academic resilience. The self-administered test assesses experiences from the past month and consists of 30 items. The scale measures three dimensions: Perseverance, Negative affect and emotional response, and Reflecting and adaptive help-seeking. The internal consistency coefficient (Cronbach's alpha) for the total score is 0.90, indicating high reliability. The scale's construct validity was established through a study involving 532 undergraduate students. Participants rate the items on a 5-point Likert scale from 1 (likely) to 5 (unlikely). The theoretical range for the global ARS-30 score is 30–150. Higher scores indicate greater levels of academic resilience, providing a comprehensive measure of students' adaptive responses to academic adversity.

Procedure

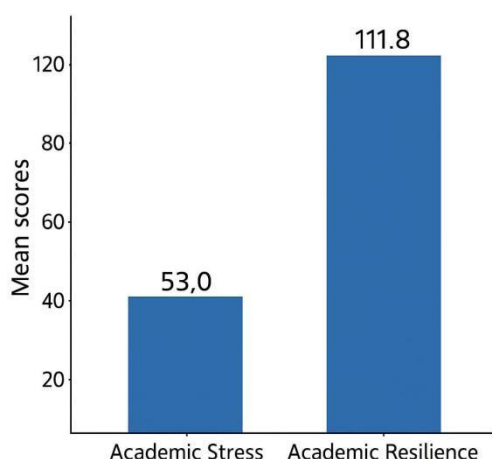
All participants were approached personally, and rapport was built. Consent forms have been signed. They were briefed about the current study's objectives. Instructions were delivered following the questionnaire. They were informed that their information would be kept confidential and used solely for research purposes, so they were asked to be open and honest in their responses, and then scales were administered and data were collected. For the data analysis purpose of the present study, firstly, the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test was used to check the normality of the data. Then, JAMOV version 2.3.28 was used, in which descriptive and correlation analyses were made according to the decision rules for testing the null hypothesis. In the first phase, Mean, Median, Mode, and SD were calculated. In the second phase, the Spearman Correlation Coefficient was used to determine the relationship between peer relationships, academic stress, and academic resilience of young adults. In the third phase, the Kruskal-Wallis H Test was used to compare academic resilience scores across the three groups, as the data distribution was non-parametric.

RESULTS

Table No. 1: Descriptive statistics (mean, median, mode, and standard deviation) concerning academic stress and academic resilience of young adults

	Academic Stress Scale	Academic Resilience Scale
N	100	100
Mean	53.0	112
Median	53.0	111
Mode	52.0	110
Standard deviation	7.05	12.1

From the above table, it can be observed that the mean of the academic stress scale is 53, which indicates a moderate level of academic stress; the mean of academic resilience is 112, which indicates the overall academic resilience of the sample is good.



Graphical representation of mean differences on academic stress and academic resilience of young adults

Table No. 2: Spearman Correlation Coefficient in academic stress and academic resilience of young adults.

		Academic Stress Scale	Academic Resilience Scale
Academic Stress Scale	Spearman's Rho		
Academic Resilience Scale	Spearman's Rho	-0.378	

It is evident from Table 2 above that there is a negative correlation between academic resilience and academic stress, which is significant at a 0.01 level.

Table No. 3: Kruskal-Wallis H Test denoting significant mean difference among different academic stress levels in terms of academic resilience of young adults.

	χ^2	df	p	ϵ^2
Academic Resilience Scale	9.21	2	0.010	0.0931

From the above table, it can be observed that there is a statistically significant mean difference in Academic Resilience across the three levels of Academic Stress (high, moderate and low levels).

DISCUSSION

The present study sought to examine the relationship between academic stress and academic resilience among young adults, as well as differences in resilience across varying levels of academic stress. The findings provide valuable insights into how resilience operates as a protective factor in the academic lives of college students.

It is observed from the Kolmogorov-Smirnov test that the data does not follow a perfectly normal distribution; the data distribution is slightly left-skewed, has heavier tails than a normal distribution, and contains outliers (136, 80, 65, and 77). Therefore, non-parametric tests have been performed in this study.

Table 1 provides valuable information about the central tendency (mean, median) and variability (standard deviation) of the three scales. The mean academic stress score is 53.0, which indicates a moderate level of academic stress. The median academic stress score is also 53.0. The mode for academic stress is 52.0. The standard deviation for academic stress is 7.05. The mean academic resilience score is 112 indicates that the overall academic resilience of the sample is good. The median academic resilience score is 111. The mode for academic resilience is 110. The standard deviation for academic resilience is 12.1.

Table 2 represents the Spearman Correlation Coefficient in academic stress and academic resilience of young adults. In this study, the results have shown that there is a negative correlation between academic resilience and academic stress, which is significant at 0.01. So Hypothesis 1 is rejected and Hypothesis 2 is accepted. This means resilient students adapt well to stressors. They may use effective coping strategies such as time management, seeking help, or maintaining a positive mindset. Resilience involves viewing challenges as opportunities for growth. Students who perceive stress as a chance to learn and improve are more likely to bounce back from setbacks. Resilient individuals utilize available resources (such as counseling services, study groups, or relaxation techniques) to manage stress. They seek support rather than becoming overwhelmed. Based on previous studies, it has been observed that resilience lessens the impacts of stress and cultivates in people a good attitude toward stress, which in turn promotes positive coping mechanisms in difficult situations (Li, 2008). Li claims that those with consistent resilience are resistant to the negative effects of stress. In a different study involving teenagers, Dumont and Procost (1999) discovered that those with greater resilience levels employ more coping mechanisms for problem-solving than do those with lower resilience levels. The findings can also be corroborated by the theory of transactional stress. This idea states that when someone encounters a stressor, they assess the possible hazard. In this assessment, the person evaluates the situation's importance first, and then he or she evaluates their coping mechanisms. According to this idea, a person with high levels of optimism and resilience will perceive a situation as less stressful, and vice versa. Personality traits like optimism, resilience, etc., also influence the appraisal process, which mediates the relationship between stressor and stress response.

In table 3, the Kruskal-Wallis test revealed a statistically significant difference in scores on the Academic Resilience Scale across the three groups ($\chi^2 = 9.21$, $df = 2$, $p = 0.010$, $\epsilon^2 = 0.0931$). With an epsilon squared of 0.0931, the effect size is modest, suggesting that group membership explains approximately 9.3% of the variance in resilience scores—a meaningful but not overwhelming effect. Hence, Hypothesis 4 is accepted and Hypothesis 3 is rejected. Moreover, the observed relationship resonates with Li's (2008) assertion that individuals with stable resilience levels demonstrate resistance to stress's negative psychological consequences. It also complements the insights from Knight (2007) and Krovetz (2008),

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who emphasized the multifaceted nature of resilience, shaped by personal characteristics, psychosocial factors, and broader sociocultural contexts. Thus, fostering resilience may involve not only building individual coping skills but also cultivating supportive academic environments that reduce unnecessary stressors and encourage adaptive responses to challenges.

Interestingly, although the effect size ($\epsilon^2 = 0.0931$) was modest, it still indicates meaningful differences, highlighting the need for targeted interventions. The study's implications suggest that colleges and universities should prioritize resilience-building programs, such as workshops on stress management, peer mentoring systems, and accessible counseling services. Doing so could transform academic stress from a debilitating force into an impetus for growth, allowing students to better navigate academic demands and maintain their psychological health.

However, this study is not without limitations. The sample was drawn from a specific geographic region (Kolkata and surrounding areas) and a narrow age range (18–25), which may limit the generalizability of the findings. Additionally, reliance on self-report measures introduces potential biases such as social desirability or inaccurate self-assessment. Future research could benefit from longitudinal designs to examine how resilience and stress interact over time, or from incorporating qualitative approaches to explore students' lived experiences in greater depth.

CONCLUSION

The study illuminates the dual edges of the academic experience, where stress and resilience dynamically interact to shape young adults' educational journeys. Findings affirm that while academic stress is prevalent and often detrimental, resilience serves as a critical buffer, enabling students to cope effectively and sustain academic motivation. Notably, the inverse relationship between stress and resilience highlights the importance of fostering resilience through strategic interventions, such as resilience training and supportive campus environments. Such initiatives can mitigate the adverse effects of stress and transform academic challenges into opportunities for growth. As concerns over student mental health rise globally, these insights offer a constructive pathway to empower students not merely to endure, but to flourish within demanding academic contexts.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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