

Research Paper

Perceived Stress, Quality of Life, and Youth Problems among Undergraduate Students in Nanded District (Maharashtra): A Correlational Study

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ABSTRACT

Youth mental health is shaped by academic demands, family expectations, and peer-based social comparison, which can influence both well-being and adjustment. The present study examined the relationships among perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems among undergraduate students in Nanded District, Maharashtra. A cross-sectional correlational research design was used. The sample comprised 120 students (60 male, 60 female), aged 16–20 years, selected through stratified sampling by gender. Measures included the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) with reverse scoring for items 4, 5, 7, and 8 (0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, 4=0) and total score interpretation for low, moderate, and high stress categories (0–13, 14–26, 27–40) the Quality of Life Scale (QOLS–SSNN) (42 items; 3-point scoring with separate rules for positive and negative statements; interpretation supported through z-score norms) and the Youth Problem Inventory (YPI–V) (80 statements; intended for ages 16–20; self-administered; domain-based problem screening; maximum total score 160). Descriptive statistics, independent-samples *t* tests, and Pearson correlations were used. Based on the summary results, higher stress was associated with lower quality of life and greater youth problems. The findings support the need for college-based counselling, stress-management training, and early screening for youth adjustment difficulties.

Keywords: *Perceived Stress, Quality of Life, Youth Problems, College Students, Nanded District, Mental Well-Being*

The undergraduate period is a critical transition in which young people manage academic performance, family responsibilities, peer relationships, and identity development. In many Indian contexts, students may also face additional pressures, such as competitive examinations, limited financial resources, long commutes, and career uncertainty. When these demands are perceived as unpredictable or difficult to control, students may experience sustained stress, which can affect both mental health and daily functioning.

Stress is often understood as an interaction between external demands and internal appraisal processes. The Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) is widely used because it emphasizes the

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individual's perception of stress how overloaded, uncontrollable, or unpredictable life feels over the recent past. The PSS scoring procedure involves reverse-scoring selected positively stated items and summing item responses, producing a total score that can be interpreted within low, moderate, and high stress ranges. This appraisal-based view is particularly suitable for college students because two students may face similar academic demands yet report different stress depending on coping resources, support systems, and cognitive appraisal.

Alongside stress, quality of life (QoL) provides a broader indicator of well-being. QoL is typically defined as the individual's overall evaluation of life satisfaction, positive functioning, and psychological and social adjustment. The QOLS-SSNN was developed through systematic item development and item analysis, resulting in a final 42-item scale. The manual indicates that QOLS-SSNN uses 3-point scoring rules applied differently for positive and negative statements and supports interpretation using z-score norms generated from standardization data. For undergraduate students, quality of life may reflect subjective well-being, motivation, emotional stability, and the ability to adapt to daily challenges.

A third outcome, youth problems, captures practical and psychosocial difficulties common in late adolescence and early adulthood. Youth problems can include family conflict, academic difficulties, social insecurity, and personal sensitivities. The Youth Problem Inventory (YPI-V) is a self-administered inventory intended for students aged 16–20 years and includes 80 statements finalized after pilot testing and standardization. The inventory is designed to identify problem areas for counselling and guidance, and the manual specifies a maximum total score of 160. Given that youth problems directly affect academic participation, social functioning, and mental well-being, they are important for both research and practice in college settings.

Nanded District includes students from diverse rural, semi-urban, and urban backgrounds. Many students experience transitions related to language, living arrangements, academic rigor, and social networks. Understanding how perceived stress relates to quality of life and youth problems in this district can support practical decision-making for colleges particularly for counselling cell strengthening, peer support initiatives, and preventive mental health programming.

Objectives

1. To assess perceived stress among undergraduate students in Nanded District.
2. To assess quality of life among undergraduate students in Nanded District.
3. To assess youth problems among undergraduate students in Nanded District.
4. To examine associations among perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems.
5. To compare male and female students on perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems.

Hypotheses

- H1: Perceived stress will be significantly negatively correlated with quality of life.
- H2: Perceived stress will be significantly positively correlated with youth problems.
- H3: Quality of life will be significantly negatively correlated with youth problems.
- H4: Male and female students will differ significantly in perceived stress and quality of life.

METHOD

Research Design

A cross-sectional correlational design was used.

Participants

The study sample comprised $N = 120$ undergraduate students from selected colleges in Nanded District, Maharashtra, including 60 males and 60 females, aged 16–20 years. Stratified sampling was used, with gender as the stratum, to ensure balanced representation.

Inclusion Criteria

- Regular undergraduate students from selected colleges in Nanded District
- Age between 16 and 20 years (consistent with YPI–V intended group)
- Voluntary participation and informed consent

Exclusion Criteria

- Incomplete responses on any scale
- Self-reported severe physical/psychiatric condition under intensive treatment at the time of data collection (where applicable)

Measures

- **Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10):** The PSS-10 uses a 0–4 response format. Scoring requires reverse-scoring items 4, 5, 7, and 8 using 0=4, 1=3, 2=2, 3=1, 4=0, followed by summing all items for a total score. Total scores range from 0 to 40, interpreted as low (0–13), moderate (14–26), and high (27–40) perceived stress
- **Quality of Life Scale (QOLS–SSNN):** The QOLS–SSNN final form contains 42 items. The manual describes a 3-point scoring system with distinct scoring rules for positive and negative statements and supports interpretation through standardized norms and z-score conversions. Higher scores indicate better perceived quality of life.
- **Youth Problem Inventory (YPI–V):** The YPI–V is a self-administered inventory for students aged 16–20 years. The final inventory includes 80 statements, reduced from an earlier larger set after pilot testing. The manual specifies that the maximum possible total score is 160. The inventory is designed to identify youth problem areas for counselling and guidance interventions.

Procedure

Permission was obtained from the relevant college authorities. Participants were informed about the purpose of the study, confidentiality of responses, and the voluntary nature of participation. Written informed consent was obtained. The PSS-10, QOLS–SSNN, and YPI–V were administered in small groups under standardised instructions. Completed questionnaires were checked for completeness and scored using the guidelines provided in the manuals and scoring instructions.

Statistical Analysis

Descriptive statistics (mean, standard deviation) were computed for each measure. Independent-samples t tests compared male and female students on perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems. Pearson correlation coefficients (r) were used to assess relationships among perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems. Significance was evaluated at $p < .05$ and $p < .01$.

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RESULTS

The results below are reported according to APA conventions using the summary statistics you provided.

Table 1 Demographic Profile of Participants (N = 120)

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	60	50.0
	Female	60	50.0
Age (years)	16–17	30	25.0
	18–19	70	58.3
	20	20	16.7
Stream	Arts	45	37.5
	Science	40	33.3
	Commerce	35	29.2

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics for Study Variables (N = 120)

Variable	M	SD
Perceived Stress (PSS-10 total)	20.10	5.60
Quality of Life (QOLS–SSNN total)	82.40	10.20
Youth Problems (YPI–V total)	76.30	14.10

Interpretation note: The mean PSS score ($M = 20.10$) falls in the moderate stress band (14–26).

Table 3 Independent-Samples *t* Tests by Gender (N = 120)

Variable	Group	n	M	SD	<i>t</i> (118)	<i>p</i>	Cohen’s <i>d</i>
Perceived Stress (PSS-10)	Male	60	21.30	5.50	2.10	<.05	0.44
	Female	60	18.90	5.40			
Quality of Life (QOLS–SSNN)	Male	60	80.90	10.10	1.85	<.10	-0.30
	Female	60	83.90	10.20			
Youth Problems (YPI–V)	Male	60	78.50	13.80	1.20	>.05	0.31
	Female	60	74.10	14.20			

Male students reported significantly higher perceived stress than female students, $t(118) = 2.10, p < .05$. Gender differences in quality of life showed a trend favoring females ($p < .10$), whereas youth problems did not differ significantly by gender ($p > .05$).

Table 4 Pearson Correlations among Perceived Stress, Quality of Life, and Youth Problems (N = 120)

Variable	1	2	3
1. Perceived Stress (PSS-10)			
2. Quality of Life (QOLS–SSNN)	-0.58**		
3. Youth Problems (YPI–V)	0.55**	-0.46**	

Note. $p < .01$.

Perceived stress showed a moderate-to-strong negative association with quality of life and a moderate positive association with youth problems. Quality of life was moderately negatively related to youth problems.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined relationships among perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems among undergraduate students in Nanded District. Overall, the pattern of results supported the theoretical expectation that stress undermines well-being and is associated with greater adjustment difficulties.

Stress and Quality of Life

The negative correlation between perceived stress and quality of life suggests that students who experienced greater perceived overload and uncontrollability tended to evaluate their lives less positively. This finding is consistent with appraisal-based stress perspectives captured by the PSS scoring framework, where higher total scores indicate greater perceived stress.

Practically, students experiencing sustained perceived stress may show reduced motivation, lower satisfaction, and weaker engagement in health-promoting behaviors, which collectively depress quality of life. Because QOLS–SSNN interpretation is supported through normative conversion methods based on standardized results, institutions can also interpret QoL scores meaningfully in relation to typical performance. In applied settings, QoL outcomes are useful because they capture not only distress but also positive functioning, which is a central goal of student mental health programs.

Stress and Youth Problems

The positive association between perceived stress and youth problems indicates that as students' perceived stress increases, they also report greater difficulties across life areas. The YPI–V is explicitly designed to identify youth problem areas and to support screening for counselling and personal help. Therefore, higher YPI–V scores in higher-stress students may represent practical targets for intervention: reducing stress may not only improve mood but also reduce daily functional problems such as conflict, academic difficulty, and social insecurity. Importantly, the YPI–V was constructed and standardized for the 16–20 age group, strengthening the appropriateness of its use in the current sample.

Quality of Life and Youth Problems

The negative correlation between quality of life and youth problems indicates that students with better perceived life functioning reported fewer youth-related difficulties. One interpretation is that quality of life reflects protective resources such as effective coping, emotional stability, perceived social support, and confidence which reduce the intensity or impact of youth problems. From a counseling perspective, strengthening QoL-related factors (goal setting, self-care, social connectedness) may reduce adjustment difficulties even when stressors cannot be removed.

Gender Differences

Male students reported significantly higher perceived stress than female students, with a small-to-moderate effect size. Gender differences in QoL showed a trend favoring females, while youth problems did not differ significantly by gender. These findings may reflect differences in coping style, social support availability, or patterns of stress appraisal. However, gender interpretations should be localized and context-sensitive in Nanded District; for example, students may differ in commuting burden, family expectations, or academic stream pressures. Colleges should avoid stereotype-based assumptions and instead use data-driven screening to identify students most in need of support.

CONCLUSION

The study examined perceived stress, quality of life, and youth problems among undergraduate students in Nanded District. Based on the provided results, perceived stress was moderately high in the sample (overall mean in the moderate stress range) and was associated with poorer quality of life and greater youth problems. Findings highlight the value of combining stress assessment with quality-of-life evaluation and youth problem screening to guide targeted student mental health initiatives.

Limitations

1. Cross-sectional design prevents causal conclusions.
2. Self-report measures may be affected by social desirability and response bias.
3. The findings may not generalize to all colleges or age groups outside the sampled colleges.

Recommendations

1. Introduce semester-wise stress-management workshops and coping skills training.
2. Strengthen counselling cells and ensure referral pathways for high-risk students (high PSS and high YPI-V).
3. Implement peer-mentoring and student support groups to enhance coping and quality of life.
4. Conduct follow-up longitudinal research to examine how stress predicts QoL and youth problems over time.

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Conflict of Interest

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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