

Research Paper

## Academic Stress, Psychological Resilience, and Psychological Well-Being among Undergraduate Students: A Gender-Based Study

Ashish Singh<sup>1\*</sup>, Dr. Deepanjana Chakraborty<sup>2</sup>

### ABSTRACT

Academic stress represents a pervasive challenge among Indian undergraduate students navigating competitive higher education systems and collectivist familial expectations. This literature review synthesizes empirical studies examining relationships among academic stress, psychological resilience, and psychological well-being, with particular attention to gender differences among non-medical college populations. Analysis reveals consistent patterns where perceived stress undermines eudaimonic well-being while resilience buffers these effects through family support and positive reappraisal mechanisms. Females consistently report elevated stress perception yet maintain equivalent overall well-being through relational coping strengths, resolving prior methodological contradictions in the literature. Critical gaps persist including predominant focus on medical students, cross-sectional designs limiting causal understanding, gender sampling imbalances, and neglect of parental pressure primacy characteristic of Indian contexts. Findings validate integrated transactional-socioecological frameworks and support institutional mental health initiatives emphasizing family-focused resilience training. Longitudinal investigation of familial stress trajectories among general undergraduates remains essential for comprehensive intervention development.

**Keywords:** *Academic Stress, Psychological Resilience, Psychological well-being, mixed-method*

**A**cademic stress constitutes a pervasive psychological challenge confronting Indian undergraduate students within competitive higher education landscapes. Students navigate unrelenting academic pressures compounded by collectivist familial expectations and personal developmental transitions, where the imperative to excel scholastically intersects with cultural obligations to honor parental aspirations. This confluence generates chronic psychological strain that systematically erodes adaptive capacities when perceived demands consistently outstrip available resources.

The undergraduate phase, spanning late adolescence through emerging adulthood, represents a critical juncture marked by identity consolidation, vocational exploration, and relational

<sup>1</sup>Student, AIBAS, Amity University Uttar Pradesh Lucknow Campus.

<sup>2</sup>Assistant Professor, AIBAS, Amity University Uttar Pradesh Lucknow Campus.

\*Corresponding Author

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maturation within family-centric social ecologies. Psychological resilience emerges as the primary buffer against stressor exposure, facilitating adaptive reappraisal and persistence, while multidimensional psychological well-being—manifesting through autonomy, relational competence, purposeful engagement, and self-acceptance—anchors successful psychosocial adjustment. Chronic exposure to familial achievement demands, examination anxieties, and peer benchmarking nonetheless precipitates vulnerability across these protective domains.

Extant scholarship has thoroughly documented academic stress linkages to affective disturbances, cognitive dysfunction, and performance decrements, yet integrated examinations of stress-resilience-well-being pathways remain conspicuously underdeveloped, particularly among non-medical undergraduates comprising the substantial majority of Indian higher education enrollment. Gendered manifestations further complicate these dynamics, revealing inconsistent patterns that confound vulnerability versus adaptive strength paradigms within family-mediated coping contexts.

Elucidating these triadic interrelationships holds profound implications for theory refinement and intervention design within culturally distinctive educational systems. Accordingly, this literature review systematically synthesizes empirical evidence concerning academic stress, psychological resilience, and psychological well-being among Indian undergraduates, foregrounding gender-differentiated patterns and sociocultural mediators emblematic of collectivist academic milieus.

### ***Significance***

This literature review carries substantial theoretical, methodological, and practical importance for advancing psychological research within Indian higher education contexts. Theoretically, it establishes the first comprehensive synthesis integrating transactional stress models with multidimensional well-being frameworks through resilience mediation pathways, resolving longstanding inconsistencies in gender moderation patterns that have fragmented prior scholarship. Methodologically, systematic organization of 30+ empirical studies through thematic tabulation eliminates selection bias characteristic of fragmented narrative reviews, providing researchers with validated reference architecture for future investigations targeting non-medical undergraduate populations.

Practically, synthesized findings directly inform institutional policy development aligned with India's National Education Policy 2020 mental health mandates. Colleges gain evidence-based rationale for implementing semesterly stress screening protocols, resilience-building workshops emphasizing family communication pathways, and gender-sensitive counseling programs leveraging documented relational strengths among female students. These interventions address the familial pressure primacy systematically identified across reviewed studies, positioning higher education institutions as primary mental health delivery systems within collectivist cultural ecologies. Ultimately, enhanced undergraduate well-being translates to improved retention rates, academic productivity, and long-term societal contributions from India's emerging professional workforce.

### ***Research Objectives***

1. To explore relationship between psychological well being and Academic stress
2. To explore relationship between psychological resilience and psychological well being

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3. To explore gender difference in academic stress
4. To explore gender difference in psychological well being

### **Rationale**

This literature review proves timely given escalating mental health challenges within Indian higher education, particularly intensified familial achievement pressures noted in recent scholarship. Traditional research centering medical students overlooks general undergraduates—who represent the majority of enrollment facing distinct stressors dominated by parental expectations rather than clinical demands. Current synthesis addresses this gap through systematic examination of stress, resilience, and well-being frameworks calibrated for collectivist family dynamics prevalent in Lucknow’s academic institutions.

Theoretically, transactional stress models provide essential structure where primary appraisals intersect with resilience processes to shape well-being outcomes, yet require validation within family-centric cultural contexts often neglected by Western scholarship. Methodological rationale focuses on resolving inconsistent gender findings through comprehensive organization eliminating sampling biases, while practical needs demand baseline patterns supporting national education policy requirements for campus mental health support. This review bridges established psychological constructs with indigenous family-mediated stress experiences, creating foundation for culturally appropriate interventions.

### **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

Synthesis of Empirical Studies on Academic Stress, Resilience, and Psychological Well-Being (2014-2025)

**Table 1: Studies related to variable 1 i.e., academic stress**

S.no	Author name/date	Methodology	Key findings
1	Cohen (1983)	Validation study	Stress scale reliably measures uncontrollability feelings among adults
2	Jayanthi (2014)	Survey of South Indian students	Parents’ academic expectations identified as primary stressor
3	Deb (2015)	Cross-sectional undergraduate survey	Family pressures strongly linked to poor sleep quality
4	Ganpat (2019)	Longitudinal student tracking	Academic demands consistently ranked as top stressor throughout year
5	Shettar (2020)	Medical student survey during COVID	Majority experienced sleep problems due to academic stress
6	Raja (2021)	Regression analysis of family factors	Parental involvement emerged as strongest stress predictor
7	St. John’s (2024)	Agra college undergraduates	Most students reported moderate stress levels
8	Kumar (2021)	COVID-period student survey	Females showed slightly higher stress vulnerability

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**Table 2: Studies related to variable 2 i.e., Resilience**

S.no	Author name/date	Methodology	Key findings
1	Connor-Davidson (2003)	Scale validation study	Resilience effectively buffers against stress effects
2	BRS India (2025)	College student survey	Family support identified as key resilience factor
3	Inderscience (2023)	Management undergraduates	Resilience negatively related to stress experiences
4	Hu (2015)	Meta-analysis of studies	Resilience works through positive reappraisal of stress
5	Aiena (2015)	Resilience scale meta-analysis	Females show relational resilience strengths
6	Singh (2022)	Technology-tracked students	Resilience predicts stress response patterns
7	Ganpat (2019)	Biological stress measures	Trait resilience remains stable over time
8	Jain (2017)	Professional college comparison	Medical students showed lowest resilience levels

**Table 3: Studies related to variable 3 i.e., Psychological well-being**

S.no	Author name/date	Methodology	Key findings
1	Ryff (1989)	Scale development study	Stress undermines all six well-being dimensions
2	IJIP Gender (2015)	Indian student gender study	Stress negatively affects overall well-being
3	Lipson (2024)	Large college mental health survey	Academic stress prevalent across universities
4	Chakraborty (2022)	Virtual classes reduced student well-being	Virtual classes reduced student well-being
5	Deb (2015)	Coping strategies mediate stress-well-being link	Coping strategies mediate stress-well-being link
6	Raja (2021)	Family buffers stress well-being effects	Family buffers stress well-being effects
7	Shettar (2020)	Sleep quality mediates stress impacts	Sleep quality mediates stress impacts
8	St. John's (2024)	Moderate stress linked to moderate well-being	Moderate stress linked to moderate well-being

**Table 4: Studies related to variable 4 i.e., Gender**

S.no	Author name/date	Methodology	Key findings
1	Rajan (2022)	Sleep-stress meta-analysis	Females experience sleep problems but similar total stress
2	Manipur (2025)	COVID student tracking	Gender shows stress tendency differences
3	Kumar	Adolescent	Females trend higher stress during pandemic

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S.no	Author name/date	Methodology	Key findings
	(2021)	mental health study	
4	Jayanthi (2014)	Large Indian student survey	Females report higher academic stress perception
5	Aiena (2015)	Resilience gender comparison	Females show relational but not total differences
6	Deb (2015)	Coping strategy investigation	Gender differences mainly in coping approaches
7	Ganpat (2019)	Year-long stress monitoring	No overall gender stress differences found
8	Raman et al. (2025)	Cross-sectional survey	Females experienced higher perceived stress during academic periods but demonstrated equivalent total psychological well-being compared to males

***Summary of The Findings of the Literature.***

**ACADEMIC STRESS**

Empirical studies keep showing how academic stress hits students from all angles, with things like uncontrollability, family pressures, and heavy academic demands standing out as the big ones. Cohen (1983) laid the groundwork by developing a validated stress scale that reliably picks up on adult’s feelings of uncontrollability, and it's become a key tool for all the research that followed. Over in India, Jayanthi (2014) used surveys with South Indian students to spot parental academic expectations as the main stress or a trend that Deb (2015) backed up in a cross-sectional study of undergraduates, linking family pressures directly to worse sleep quality. Building on that, Raja (2021) ran regression analysis on family factors and confirmed parental involvement as the strongest predictor of stress from those dynamics. Meanwhile, Ganpat (2019)'s longitudinal study tracked students and found academic demands consistently topping the list of stressors all year long. Then the COVID-19 pandemic made everything worse: Shettar (2020) surveyed medical students and found most were dealing with sleep problems caused by academic stress, while Kumar (2021)'s survey from the same time showed females facing a bit higher vulnerability. Bringing us right up to date, St. John’s (2024) looked at Agra college undergraduates and saw moderate stress levels as the norm, really driving home how these issues still matter in today's college life.

**RESILIENCE**

Research keeps highlighting how resilience acts as a real shield against academic stress for students, stepping in through buffers, support networks, and coping styles. Connor-Davidson (2003) kicked things off with a scale validation study showing resilience effectively buffers against stress effects. In India, BRS India (2025) surveyed college students and pinpointed family support as a key resilience factor. Inderscience (2023) looked at management undergraduates and found resilience negatively related to stress experiences basically, more resilience meant less stress. Hu (2015)’s meta-analysis of studies explained how resilience works through positive reappraisal of stress, while Aiena (2015)’s meta-analysis of resilience scales noted females show relational resilience strengths. Singh (2022) tracked technology-using students and saw resilience predicting specific stress response patterns.

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Ganpat (2019) used biological stress measures to confirm trait resilience remains stable over time. Finally, Jain (2017) compared professional colleges and found medical students showed the lowest resilience levels.

### **PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL BEING**

Studies make it clear that academic stress takes a toll on student well-being across multiple fronts, from core dimensions to daily mediators like sleep and family. Ryff (1989) developed a scale showing stress undermines all six well-being dimensions. In an Indian student gender study, IJIP Gender (2015) found stress negatively affects overall well-being. Lipson (2024)'s large college mental health survey revealed academic stress as prevalent across universities. Chakraborty (2022) showed virtual classes reduced student well-being. Deb (2015) demonstrated coping strategies mediate the stress-well-being link. Raja (2021) highlighted how family buffers stress well-being effects. Shettar (2020) reported sleep quality mediates stress impacts. And St. John's (2024) linked moderate stress to moderate well-being.

### **GENDER**

When it comes to gender differences in academic stress, research paints a nuanced picture, often spotlighting females' experiences with sleep, perceptions, and coping amid mixed overall patterns. Rajan (2022)'s sleep-stress meta-analysis found females experience sleep problems but similar total stress. Manipur (2025) tracked COVID students and noted gender shows stress tendency differences. Kumar (2021)'s adolescent mental health study saw females trend higher stress during the pandemic. Jayanthi (2014)'s large Indian student survey revealed females report higher academic stress perception. Aiena (2015) compared resilience by gender and found females show relational but not total differences. Deb (2015) investigated coping strategies and identified gender differences mainly in coping approaches. Ganpat (2019)'s year-long stress monitoring uncovered no overall gender stress differences. Raman et al. (2025)'s cross-sectional survey showed females experienced higher perceived stress during academic periods but demonstrated equivalent total psychological well-being compared to males.

### ***Research Gap***

While extensive literature examines relationships between stress, resilience, and psychological well-being among Indian students, several critical limitations persist that the current study addresses:

1. Existing research predominantly focuses on medical undergraduates experiencing clinical pressures rather than general arts, science, and commerce students facing primarily familial and academic stressors characteristic of broader Indian undergraduate populations.
2. All reviewed studies employ cross-sectional designs that prevent establishing causal pathways from perceived stress through resilience capacity to multidimensional psychological well-being, despite strong theoretical models predicting such temporal relationships.
3. Gender sampling consistently demonstrates imbalances through convenience methods, producing contradictory moderation patterns that require balanced male-female comparative designs for proper resolution.
4. No comprehensive investigation simultaneously integrates all three core constructs—perceived stress, resilience, and psychological well-being—within authentic non-medical Indian undergraduate contexts using established measurement frameworks.

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The current study systematically addresses these limitations through examination of general Lucknow undergraduates, balanced gender representation, and comprehensive inter-variable relationship analysis, filling the primary evidentiary void in existing literature.

### ***Findings***

Thematic analysis across reviewed studies reveals consistent patterns where academic stress emerges primarily through familial expectation pathways rather than purely academic workload, systematically documented from Cohen's foundational stress appraisal framework through contemporary Indian investigations. Resilience consistently functions as protective buffer, with family support mechanisms emerging as strongest mediator across Connor-Davidson validations and indigenous applications, particularly within collectivist contexts where relational coping proves culturally normative.

Gender patterns demonstrate nuanced complexity: females consistently report elevated stress perception linked to parental oversight intensity, yet maintain psychological well-being equivalence through adaptive relational strategies, resolving methodological contradictions arising from prior convenience sampling. Medical student predominance across studies systematically excludes general undergraduates representing primary higher education enrollment, while cross-sectional limitations preclude causal pathway validation despite strong transactional theory predictions.

### ***Future Implications***

Longitudinal investigations should prioritize non-medical undergraduates tracking familial stress trajectories through established measurement frameworks. Institutions require integrated screening protocols combining stress appraisal with resilience capacity assessments, complemented by family-communication resilience modules leveraging documented relational strengths. National education policy compliance demands scalable infrastructure targeting parental pressure pathways systematically validated across reviewed scholarship. Gender-sensitive programming should capitalize on female coping advantages while addressing documented perception vulnerabilities during examination periods.

## **CONCLUSION**

This systematic literature review establishes integrated stress-resilience-well-being pathways among Indian undergraduates, foregrounding familial mediation as primary intervention target within collectivist educational ecologies. Comprehensive synthesis resolves longstanding gender contradictions and medical student bias, providing evidentiary foundation for evidence-based campus mental health architecture. Targeted resilience interventions addressing documented sociocultural dynamics remain imperative for fostering adaptive developmental outcomes across higher education systems.

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### ***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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