

## Protective Factors for Resilience, Stress and Depression among College-Going Students

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### ABSTRACT

Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) play a significant role in promoting psychological well-being and reducing mental health difficulties among young adults. College-going students are particularly vulnerable to stress and depression due to academic, social, and developmental challenges. Understanding the influence of resilience-related factors on mental health outcomes is therefore essential. The current study aimed to assess the levels of Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR), stress, and depression among college-going students and to examine whether PFR significantly predicts stress and depression. A cross-sectional quantitative research design was employed among 515 college-going students. Data were collected using standardized measures assessing stress, depression, and Protective Factors for Resilience. Descriptive statistics, frequency analysis, and simple linear regression analyses were conducted to analyze the data. The findings revealed that the majority of participants were female (95.5%) and aged between 18–20 years (50.5%). Nearly half of the participants demonstrated average levels of PFR (48.7%), while 28.2% reported high Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) levels. Moderate to severe levels of stress and depression were observed among a substantial proportion of students. The mean scores for stress, depression, and Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) were 17.67 (SD = 9.39), 17.70 (SD = 10.57), and 72.72 (SD = 22.03), respectively. Regression analysis indicated that Protective Factors for Resilience significantly and negatively predicted stress,  $F(1, 513) = 7.75, p = .006$ , accounting for 1.5% of the variance in stress scores ( $R^2 = .015$ ). Similarly, PFR significantly and negatively predicted depression,  $F(1, 513) = 5.49, p = .019$ , explaining 1.1% of the variance in depression scores ( $R^2 = .011$ ). Higher protective Factors for resilience (PFR) scores were associated with lower stress and depression levels. The study highlights the protective role of resilience factors in reducing stress and depression among college-going students. Although the predictive strength was small, the findings emphasize the importance of enhancing resilience-building interventions and psychological support programs within educational settings to promote students' mental well-being.

**Keywords:** *Protective Factors for Resilience, Stress, Depression, College-Going Students, Resilience*

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**R**esilience is a process in which an individual can cope with difficult or life changing situations, mentally, emotionally and in behavioural adaption and adjustment to internal and external demands (APA, 2026). Resilience extends beyond mere flexibility; it involves an awareness of one's strengths and the capacity to effectively utilize them when facing adversity. An individual with resilience can adapt successfully to crises or traumatic situations through positive psychological and behavioural adjustment. (U.S Department of State, Jan 2017). Resilience is influenced by a range of biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors, all of which interact dynamically to shape an individual's response to stressful experiences (Southwick S.M, et al., 2014). When defining resilience, it is essential to clarify whether it is conceptualized as a trait, an outcome, or a process. Although resilience is often viewed in binary terms as either present or absent, it is more accurately understood as existing along a continuum, varying in degree across different areas of an individual's life (Southwick S.M, et al, 2014). Positive psychology focuses on moving the objective of therapy and research beyond simply alleviating symptoms or reducing negative mental health outcomes toward enhancing subjective well-being. Existing research indicates that individuals with higher levels of psychological resilience and hardiness tend to experience a lesser adverse impact of depression and anxiety on their overall well-being (Chuning et.al, 2024). Developing resilience involves strengthening coping strategies, nurturing supportive relationships, and engaging in self-care practices, all of which contribute to greater life satisfaction and improved adaptability (Sutton, 2019). Research suggests that resilience is shaped by many factors such as our traits, our learned capacity through personal experiences and environmental factors (Sutton, 2019 as cited in Pemberton, 2015). Protective factors refer to conditions or the influences that help buffer the harmful effects of adverse or negative experiences, promote overall well-being and health, decrease the likelihood of engaging in risky behaviours, and support emotional and behavioural stability (Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, 2023). Supporting this perspective, a study by Askeland et al. (2020) found that exposure to negative life events was associated with increased depressive symptoms. However, the presence of protective factors such as goal orientation, social competence, social support, self-confidence, and family cohesion contributed to lower levels of depressive symptoms. Protective factors at the individual, family, and community levels play an important role in fostering resilience by helping individuals manage stressful situations more effectively and by reinforcing characteristics that reduce the risk of mental health or substance use difficulties. Along with effective coping skills, these protective factors enhance resilience, enabling individuals to recover from and overcome adversity (Mental Health First Aid, 2022). Resilience-enhancing or adversity-buffering factors include strong supportive relationships and adaptive coping strategies. Understanding the mechanisms that contribute to resilience is essential for recognizing critical concerns such as maternal depression, which is frequently associated with family conflict, poor coping methods, and maladaptive parenting practices (Abate et., al, 2024). Research has proven that Familial conflict and violence is linked with the development of depression (Carbonell, et., al 2002). As emphasized by Masten (2001, 2014) resilience among youth who are exposed to high-risk conditions are shaped by multiple factors like problem-solving skills, cognitive abilities along with positive attributes such as optimism and hope, self-control, motivation to succeed and goal-oriented planning. At the relationship level high quality parenting, strong relationships with adults, supportive caregiving, close friends and romantic partners play a crucial role. Additionally, larger social systems like schools and communities offer essential support and protective structures to foster resilience (Ellis, et al., 2017). A recent meta-analysis found that family social support serves as a significant protective factor against depression; however, the evidence regarding the protective role of peer support remains

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inconsistent (Askeland et al., 2020) Stress is another common outcome that emerges from negative or adverse experiences. Such experiences may also lead to reduced well-being, anxiety, or post-traumatic stress disorder. However, some individuals are able to develop resilience, which enables them to maintain better mental health despite adversity. Research has shown that emotional regulation plays a significant role in the development and maintenance of resilience (Southwick et al., 2011).

Resilience is a dynamic and multifaceted process that enables individuals to adapt effectively to adversity, stress, and life challenges. Existing literature highlights that resilience is influenced by biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors, which collectively shape an individual's ability to cope with difficult experiences. Protective factors such as supportive relationships, emotional regulation, coping strategies, self-confidence, family cohesion, optimism, and social support contribute significantly to resilience and psychological well-being. Research further suggests that individuals with greater resilience experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression, thereby improving overall mental health and life satisfaction.

Among college-going students, exposure to academic pressures, interpersonal conflicts, family-related stressors, and adjustment difficulties may increase vulnerability to stress and depression. However, resilience and protective factors can serve as buffers against these adverse mental health outcomes. Previous studies have consistently emphasized the role of resilience-enhancing factors in promoting positive adaptation and reducing psychological distress. Therefore, understanding the relationship between protective factors for resilience, stress, and depression is essential in promoting mental well-being among young adults.

### ***Research Gap***

Although previous studies have established the association between resilience and mental health outcomes such as stress, anxiety, and depression, much of the existing literature primarily focuses on pathological symptoms rather than protective and resilience-related strengths. Limited research has specifically examined the predictive role of Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) on stress and depression among college-going students, particularly within the Indian context. Furthermore, existing studies often focus on isolated protective factors such as social support or coping strategies rather than considering resilience as a multidimensional construct influenced by individual, familial, and social factors.

Therefore, the present study attempts to address this gap by examining the levels of protective factors for resilience (PFR), stress, and depression among college-going students and by investigating whether PFR significantly predicts stress and depression. The study aims to contribute to the existing literature by emphasizing resilience as a protective mechanism that may reduce psychological distress among young adults.

### ***Relevance of the Study***

Mental health concerns among college-going students have increased considerably due to academic pressure, interpersonal difficulties, family-related stressors, uncertainty about the future, and challenges associated with emerging adulthood. Stress and depression are among the most commonly experienced psychological difficulties in this population and can negatively affect academic performance, emotional well-being, interpersonal relationships, and overall quality of life. In recent years, the focus of psychological research has gradually shifted from merely identifying psychopathology to understanding the strengths and

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protective mechanisms that promote well-being and healthy adaptation. Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR), such as emotional regulation, social support, coping skills, optimism, self-confidence, and family cohesion, play an important role in helping individuals manage adversity and maintain psychological well-being. Existing literature suggests that individuals with higher resilience tend to experience lower levels of stress, anxiety, and depression.

Since college students are at a vulnerable developmental stage characterized by emotional, social, and academic transitions, understanding the role of resilience in mental health becomes highly significant. The present study is relevant because it emphasizes a strengths-based approach by examining how resilience-related protective factors influence stress and depression among college-going students. The findings may help psychologists, counsellors, educators, and mental health professionals develop resilience-based interventions, counselling programs, and preventive mental health strategies within educational settings. Additionally, the study may contribute to improving awareness regarding the importance of emotional resilience and supportive environments in promoting students' psychological well-being.

### METHODOLOGY

#### *Sample:*

The sample comprises of 515 nursing college students within the age group of 18-25 years hailing from Amethi in Uttar Pradesh.

#### *Instruments:*

The Protective Factors for Resilience Scale (PFRS) was used to assess the protective factors that contribute to resilience among participants. Developed by C. Harms, J. Pooley, and L. Cohen (2017), the PFRS is a 15-item self-report measure designed for individuals aged 16 years and above. The scale is grounded in resilience theory, which identifies individual strengths, family support, and social support as key protective factors that enhance an individual's ability to cope effectively with adversity.

The PFRS comprises three subscales: **Personal Resources**, **Peer Resources**, and **Family Resources**, with each subscale containing five items. Responses are recorded on a **7-point Likert scale**, ranging from **1 (Strongly Disagree)** to **7 (Strongly Agree)**. Total scores on the scale range from **15 to 105**, with higher scores indicating greater perceived protective resources for resilience. Scores for each subscale range from **5 to 35**, with higher scores reflecting stronger protective resources in the respective domain.

#### *Procedure:*

Data was collected using the Protective Factors for Resilience Scale (PFRS), which was administered to students through an online questionnaire prepared using Google Forms. Prior to participation, the purpose of the study was explained to the participants, and informed consent was obtained electronically. Participants were assured that their responses would remain confidential and would be used solely for research purposes. Participation in the study was entirely voluntary, and respondents were given the freedom to withdraw from the study at any stage without any consequences.

After obtaining consent, participants completed the questionnaire online. Once the responses were collected, the data were scored according to the scoring procedure specified for the PFRS. The total and subscale scores were calculated, and the results were interpreted using

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sample-based interpretation to determine the level of protective factors for resilience among the participants

### RESULTS

*Table 1: Demographic Characteristics of Participants*

Demographic Factors	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)	
Gender	Male	23	4.5	
	Female	492	95.5	
Age	18-20	260	50.5	
	21-23	179	34.8	
	24-26	52	10.1	
	26-30	27	5.2	
Living Condition	Home	301	58.4	
	PG	85	16.5	
	Hostel	129	25	
Parental Marital Status	Married	314	61	
	Single parenting	176	34.2	
	Widowed	25	4.9	
No of Siblings	0	46	8.9	
	1	81	15.7	
	2	163	31.7	
	3 or more	225	43.7	
Relationship Status	Single	444	86.2	
	Committed	53	10.3	
	Casual/Open	18	3.5	

The demographic characteristics of the participants indicated that the majority were female (95.5%), while males constituted 4.5% of the sample. In terms of age, most participants were between 18–20 years (50.5%), followed by 21–23 years (34.8%), 24–26 years (10.1%), and 26–30 years (5.2%).

Regarding living conditions, more than half of the participants lived at home (58.4%), whereas 25% resided in hostels and 16.5% stayed in paying guest (PG) accommodations. With respect to parental marital status, the majority of participants reported that their parents were married (61%), followed by single parenting households (34.2%) and widowed parents (4.9%).

In relation to the number of siblings, most participants reported having three or more siblings (43.7%), followed by two siblings (31.7%), one sibling (15.7%), and no siblings (8.9%). Concerning relationship status, the majority of participants identified themselves as single (86.2%), while 10.3% reported being in a committed relationship and 3.5% identified as being in a casual or open relationship.

*Table 2: Mean and SD of study variables*

Variables	N	Mean	SD
Stress	515	17.67	9.39
Depression	515	17.70	10.57
PRF	515	72.72	22.03

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Table 2 presents the descriptive statistics for stress, depression, and protective and resilience factors (PRF) among the participants (N = 515). The mean stress score was 17.67 (SD = 9.39), with scores ranging from 0 to 42, indicating moderate levels of perceived stress among the participants. Similarly, the mean depression score was 17.70 (SD = 10.57), with scores also ranging from 0 to 42, suggesting moderate depressive symptoms within the sample.

The mean PRF score was 72.72 (SD = 22.03), with scores ranging from 15 to 105, indicating relatively high levels of protective and resilience factors among the participants. The larger standard deviation for PRF suggests greater variability in resilience-related characteristics across the sample compared to stress and depression.

**Table 3: Status of Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) among college-going students (N = 515)**

PFR Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Low	119	23.1
Average	251	48.7
High	145	28.2
Total	515	100

Table 3 presents the status of Protective factors for Resilience (PFR) among college-going students. Nearly half of the participants (48.7%) demonstrated average levels of PRF. High PRF levels were observed among 28.2% of the participants, while 23.1% showed low PRF levels. The findings indicate that most college-going students possessed moderate to high protective resilience factors.

**Table 4: Status of Stress among College students**

Stress Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	195	37.9
Mild	88	17.1
Moderate	113	21.9
Severe	92	17.9
Extremely Severe	27	5.2
Total	515	100

Table 4 presents the status of stress among college-going students. Majority of the participants reported normal levels of stress (37.9%). Moderate stress was observed among 21.9% of the participants, while 17.9% experienced severe stress. Mild stress was reported by 17.1% of the students, and 5.2% experienced extremely severe stress. The findings indicate that although a considerable proportion of students had normal stress levels, a substantial number experienced moderate to extremely severe stress.

**Table 5: Status of Depression among college-going students**

Depression Level	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Normal	125	24.3
Mild	33	6.4
Moderate	168	32.6
Severe	95	18.4
Extremely Severe	94	18.3
Total	515	100

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Table 5 presents the status of depression among college-going students. Majority of the participants experienced moderate depression (32.6%). Severe and extremely severe depression were reported by 18.4% and 18.3% of the participants respectively. Normal levels of depression were observed among 24.3% of the students, while only 6.4% reported mild depression. The findings suggest that a substantial proportion of college-going students experienced moderate to extremely severe depressive symptoms.

**Table 6: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) Predicting Stress among College-going Students**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% CI for B
Stress	21.450	1.419	-	15.120	.001	[18.66, 24.24]
PFR	-0.052	0.019	-0.122	-2.784	.006	[-0.089, -0.015]

Note:  $R^2 = .015$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .013$ ,  $F(1, 513) = 7.75$ ,  $p = .006$

$B =$  Unstandardized coefficient,  $SE =$  Standard Error,  $\beta =$  Standardized coefficient,  $CI =$  Confidence Interval

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to determine whether Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) significantly predicted stress scores. The overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 513) = 7.75$ ,  $p = .006$ , indicating that PFR significantly predicted stress. The model explained 1.5% of the variance in stress scores ( $R^2 = .015$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .013$ ).

The regression coefficient for PFR was negative and statistically significant,  $B = -0.052$ ,  $SE = 0.019$ ,  $\beta = -0.122$ ,  $t = -2.784$ ,  $p = .006$ . This suggests that higher PFR scores were associated with lower levels of stress. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in PFR, stress scores decreased by 0.052 units.

Overall, the findings indicate that PFR has a small but statistically significant negative influence on stress among the participants.

**Table 7: Simple Linear Regression Analysis of Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) Predicting Depression among College-going Students**

Predictor	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p	95% CI for B
Depression	21.297	1.601	-	13.300	.001	[18.16, 24.44]
PFR	-0.049	0.021	-0.103	-2.344	.019	[-0.090, -0.008]

Note:  $R^2 = .011$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .009$ ,  $F(1, 513) = 5.49$ ,  $p = .019$

$B =$  Unstandardized coefficient,  $SE =$  Standard Error,  $\beta =$  Standardized coefficient,  $CI =$  Confidence Interval

A simple linear regression analysis was conducted to examine whether Protective Factors for Resilience (PFR) significantly predicted depression scores. The overall regression model was statistically significant,  $F(1, 513) = 5.49$ ,  $p = .019$ , indicating that PFR significantly predicted depression. The model explained 1.1% of the variance in depression scores ( $R^2 = .011$ , Adjusted  $R^2 = .009$ ).

The regression coefficient for PFR was negative and statistically significant,  $B = -0.049$ ,  $SE = 0.021$ ,  $\beta = -0.103$ ,  $t = -2.344$ ,  $p = .019$ . This indicates that higher PFR scores were associated with lower levels of depression. Specifically, for every one-unit increase in PFR, depression scores decreased by 0.049 units.

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Overall, the findings suggest that PRF has a small but significant negative influence on depression among the participants.

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***Conflict of Interest***

The author(s) declared no conflict of interest.

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