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Research Paper

The Influence of Academic Stress on Emotional Stability and Self-Acceptance among Undergraduate Students

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ABSTRACT

I examined how perceived academic stress relates to emotional stability and self-acceptance among undergraduate students (N = 100), using a cross-sectional online survey and three standardized measures. Participants reported academic stress at the neutral scale midpoint (M = 2.99), and emotional stability significantly below its midpoint (M = 2.86, p = .036). Stress nonetheless correlated negatively with emotional stability, r = -.20, p = .046, and predicted self-acceptance, R^2 = .183, p < .001, explaining more than four times as much variance in self-evaluation as in trait reactivity. No differences emerged by gender, year of study, or faculty. Academic stress need not reach severe levels before it is associated with reduced psychological functioning.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Emotional Stability, Self-Acceptance, Eudaimonic Well-Being, Undergraduate Students, Psychological Well-Being*

The transition into higher education increases academic autonomy, cognitive demand, and socio-emotional responsibility simultaneously. Undergraduate students must manage coursework, continuous assessment, faculty expectations, and career planning, and this environment introduces psychological stressors alongside its intended intellectual benefits. Academic stress refers to the cognitive, emotional, and physiological strain students experience when they perceive academic demands as exceeding their personal and institutional resources. Chronic academic stress can impair cognitive processing, reduce academic performance, and compromise psychological well-being (Reddy et al., 2018).

Two psychological constructs are central to how students absorb this pressure. Emotional stability is a primary domain of the Five-Factor Model, representing the bipolar inverse of neuroticism, and reflects the capacity to maintain composure and regulate negative affect under pressure (John & Srivastava, 1999). Self-acceptance is a foundational dimension of Ryff's (1989) model of eudaimonic well-being, denoting a positive and realistic orientation toward oneself that acknowledges both strengths and limitations. The two constructs differ in kind: one is dispositional and the other evaluative. Much of the literature nonetheless

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collapses them into composite well-being indices, which obscures the possibility that academic stress bears on them unequally.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

Three frameworks guided this study. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model treats stress as a relational dynamic rather than an objective condition. An academic demand triggers primary appraisal, in which the student evaluates whether it constitutes a threat, harm, or manageable challenge, and secondary appraisal, in which the student evaluates available coping resources. Stress emerges when demands exceed appraised resources. Critically, the model does not require demands to be extreme; what matters is the ratio of appraised demand to appraised resource. This makes it possible for stress at ordinary levels to carry measurable psychological cost, a prediction the present study tests directly.

Costa and McCrae's (1992) Five-Factor Model conceptualizes personality traits as enduring dispositions that remain relatively stable across time and situation. Because trait measures resist short-term environmental fluctuation (McCrae & Costa, 2008), theory predicts that a situational variable such as academic stress should relate to trait emotional stability reliably but weakly.

Rogers (1961) conceptualized self-acceptance as unconditional positive self-regard, and argued that when individuals internalize external performance standards as conditions of worth, self-regard becomes contingent on meeting them. Ryff (1989) subsequently established self-acceptance as a core dimension of eudaimonic well-being, and Ryff and Keyes (1995) positioned it as the dimension most closely tied to global self-evaluation. Together these accounts supply a specific prediction: because academic performance is the domain in which undergraduates are most continuously and publicly evaluated, it is the domain most likely to have been internalized as a condition of worth, so academic stress should bear more strongly on self-acceptance than on trait emotional stability.

Empirical Background

A substantial literature documents elevated academic distress among undergraduates (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Joseph et al., 2020; Perez-Jorge et al., 2025), while other work emphasizes that mean stress levels vary considerably across institutional and temporal contexts and do not always reach clinically elevated thresholds (Travis et al., 2023; Wiklund et al., 2020). These strands are reconcilable if the psychologically relevant question is not whether mean stress is high, but whether variation in stress tracks variation in well-being at whatever level it occurs.

Regarding emotional stability, Denovan and Macaskill (2019) found that higher resilience and emotional stability were associated with lower perceived stress and better psychological adjustment, and Zhang et al. (2024) reported that students with greater emotional regulation capacity experienced lower academic stress. Regarding self-acceptance, Liu et al. (2024) found that higher academic stress was associated with lower academic self-efficacy, indicating that stress degrades students' appraisal of their own competence, and Barbayannis et al. (2022) reported a significant inverse relationship between academic stress and psychological well-being more broadly. Meta-analytic evidence consistently documents positive intercorrelations between emotional stability and well-being dimensions (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Steel et al., 2008).

Demographic variation represents a further open question. Several studies report that female undergraduates disclose higher perceived stress than male undergraduates, attributed to differences in role strain, appraisal style, and willingness to report distress (Brougham et al., 2009; Graves et al., 2021; Misra & McKean, 2000). Misra and McKean (2000) additionally found that first- and second-year students reported stronger stress reactions than third- and fourth-year students, consistent with the transactional model, since accumulated assessment experience should render secondary appraisal more efficient. Evidence for disciplinary differences is inconsistent and often confounded with institutional context. These effects are frequently reported descriptively rather than tested inferentially.

The Present Study

I examined the relationships among perceived academic stress, emotional stability, and self-acceptance in an undergraduate sample, and tested whether these variables differ across gender, year of study, and faculty. I tested five null hypotheses:

- **H1:** Undergraduate students do not report perceived academic stress significantly above the scale midpoint.
- **H2:** Undergraduate students do not report emotional stability or self-acceptance significantly below their respective scale midpoints.
- **H3:** There is no significant correlation between perceived academic stress and emotional stability.
- **H4:** Perceived academic stress does not significantly predict self-acceptance.
- **H5:** Perceived academic stress, emotional stability, and self-acceptance do not differ significantly by (a) gender, (b) year of study, or (c) faculty of enrollment.

METHOD

Design

I used a quantitative, non-experimental, cross-sectional, correlational design. I introduced no experimental manipulation and instead correlated naturally occurring variation in perceived academic stress with personality and well-being measures. I captured all data at a single time point through an online self-report survey administered during a regular academic teaching term.

Participants

The sample comprised 100 undergraduate students (M_{age} = 22.59 years, SD = 3.82, range 18-39). Seventy participants identified as female, 28 as male, and 2 preferred not to disclose gender. Seventeen were in their first year, 17 in their second, 22 in their third, and 44 in their fourth year or beyond. I coded 59 distinct self-reported majors into four faculty clusters: Business and Management (n = 37), Humanities and Social Sciences (n = 36), Health and Applied Sciences (n = 16), and Engineering and Information Technology (n = 11). Psychology was the single most frequently reported major, at 16% of the sample.

I recruited participants through academic networks, institutional communication channels, and direct digital outreach, using non-probability convenience sampling. Inclusion criteria were current enrollment as an active undergraduate student, age of 18 years or older, and ability to complete an English-language survey. I excluded non-student and postgraduate respondents and incomplete or duplicate submissions. This sample size satisfies power requirements for bivariate correlation and simple linear regression (f^2 = 0.15, alpha = .05, power >= .80; Cohen, 1988), though the subgroup comparisons under H5 carry lower power.

Measures

Perception of Academic Stress Scale

The Perception of Academic Stress Scale (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015) comprises 18 items assessing academic expectations, workload and examinations, academic self-perceptions, and time constraints on a 5-point Likert scale. Total scores range from 18 to 90 and per-item means from 1.00 to 5.00, with a midpoint of 3.00. Higher scores indicate greater perceived stress. Published internal consistency ranges from .70 to .80; in this sample Cronbach's alpha was .85.

The administered form used two different response anchor sets. Items 1 to 5 are positively worded statements indicating the absence of stress, presented with anchors from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Items 6 to 18 are stress-worded statements presented with inverted anchors, from 1 (*strongly agree*) to 5 (*strongly disagree*). Both blocks therefore required reverse-scoring before totaling.

Big Five Inventory Emotional Stability Subscale

The Emotional Stability subscale of the Big Five Inventory (John et al., 1991; John & Srivastava, 1999) comprises the eight items of the reverse-keyed neuroticism domain, rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 5 (*strongly agree*). Total scores range from 8 to 40 and per-item means from 1.00 to 5.00, with a midpoint of 3.00. I reverse-scored the five neuroticism-worded items and scored the three stability-worded items directly, so that higher scores indicate greater emotional stability. Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .79.

Ryff's Self-Acceptance Subscale

The Self-Acceptance subscale of Ryff's Scales of Psychological Well-Being (Ryff, 1989) comprises seven items measuring positive self-attitude and acceptance of personal attributes and past experiences, rated from 1 (*strongly disagree*) to 6 (*strongly agree*). Total scores range from 7 to 42 and per-item means from 1.00 to 6.00, with a midpoint of 3.50. I reverse-scored the three negatively worded items. Cronbach's alpha in this sample was .80. The complete item set for all three measures appears in Appendix B.

Procedure

I compiled the demographic sheet and three inventories into a single online form with mandatory response validation to prevent missing values, and distributed the link through undergraduate student channels and academic groups. Participants reviewed an informed consent statement describing the purpose of the study, an estimated completion time of 10 to 12 minutes, and their right to withdraw before submission without penalty. I collected no personally identifiable information and assigned each response an alphanumeric identifier. The study posed minimal psychological risk, since all items concerned routine academic perceptions and general psychological attitudes.

Verification of Scoring Keys

Because the administered form used different response anchors for different item blocks, I verified the reverse-scoring key for each scale empirically before conducting any hypothesis testing, using three convergent checks. First, I correlated each item with the total of the remaining items in its scale, since a correctly keyed item correlates positively and a negative coefficient indicates misorientation. Second, I computed Cronbach's alpha under every possible reversal pattern, on the principle that the correct key maximizes internal consistency. Third, I anchored each composite against external criteria: a correctly scored

academic stress measure must correlate positively with neuroticism and negatively with self-acceptance. I then checked the resulting keys against the response labels printed in the survey export.

This procedure identified two scoring errors in the initial dataset. Items 6 to 18 of the academic stress scale had been totaled without reverse-scoring despite their inverted anchors; correcting this raised Cronbach's alpha from .71 to .85 and rendered all 18 item-rest correlations positive. The emotional stability composite had been formed by reverse-scoring the three stability-worded items rather than the five neuroticism-worded items, producing an internally consistent scale oriented toward neuroticism rather than emotional stability; reflecting the composite corrected its polarity without altering its reliability. The self-acceptance subscale required no correction. All results below use the verified keys.

Data Analysis

I conducted all analyses in Python using the pandas, NumPy, SciPy, and statsmodels libraries, evaluating significance at alpha = .05 with two-tailed tests throughout. I tested H1 and H2 with one-sample *t* tests against scale midpoints, reporting Cohen's *d*. I tested H3 with a bivariate Pearson correlation and H4 with a simple linear regression predicting self-acceptance from academic stress. I tested H5 with independent-samples *t* tests for the gender comparison and one-way analyses of variance for the four-level year of study and faculty comparisons, reporting Cohen's *d* and eta squared respectively. Where Levene's test indicated unequal variances, I computed Welch-type corrections as robustness checks.

RESULTS

Descriptive Statistics and Assumption Checks

Table 1 reports descriptive statistics and internal consistency for the three study variables. Full intercorrelations, including age and gender, appear in Appendix A.

Table 1 Descriptive Statistics and Reliability for the Study Variables (N = 100)

Variable	Items	Midpoint	Total M (SD)	Item M (SD)	Range	Alpha
Academic stress	18	3.00	53.87 (10.85)	2.99 (0.60)	27-86	.85
Emotional stability	8	3.00	22.85 (5.41)	2.86 (0.68)	13-38	.79
Self-acceptance	7	3.50	27.30 (6.29)	3.90 (0.90)	12-42	.80

Note. Midpoint refers to the neutral per-item value on each response scale. Range refers to observed composite totals. Alpha = Cronbach's alpha computed on the present sample.

Academic stress and self-acceptance met formal normality criteria, Shapiro-Wilk $W = 0.993$, $p = .911$ and $W = 0.991$, $p = .765$. Emotional stability showed a minor positive skew, $W = 0.973$, $p = .039$, skewness = 0.50, which falls well within conventional limits and does not compromise parametric robustness at this sample size. Scatterplots confirmed approximately linear relationships with no evident curvature. Durbin-Watson statistics of 1.88 and 1.67 indicated no meaningful residual autocorrelation, and Breusch-Pagan tests were non-significant for both regression models, LM = 0.53, $p = .466$ and LM = 0.33, $p = .566$.

Levene's test indicated homogeneous variances for all comparisons involving emotional stability and for all year-of-study comparisons. Three exceptions arose: academic stress by gender, $F(1, 96) = 6.11$, $p = .015$; self-acceptance by gender, $F(1, 96) = 4.28$, $p = .041$; and

self-acceptance by faculty, $F(3, 96) = 5.85$, $p = .001$. Welch-type corrections for these three tests produced the same non-significant conclusions reported below.

Prevalence of Academic Stress and Well-Being (H1 and H2)

Table 2 reports the one-sample comparisons against scale midpoints.

Table 2 One-Sample t Tests Against Scale Midpoints (N = 100)

Variable	M	Test value	t(99)	p	95% CI	d
Academic stress	2.99	3.00	-0.12	.905	[2.87, 3.11]	-0.01
Emotional stability	2.86	3.00	-2.13	.036	[2.72, 2.99]	-0.21
Self-acceptance	3.90	3.50	4.45	< .001	[3.72, 4.08]	0.45

Note. CI = confidence interval for the sample mean. d = Cohen's d.

Mean academic stress was statistically indistinguishable from the scale midpoint, $t(99) = -0.12$, $p = .905$, $d = -0.01$, with a confidence interval tightly centered on 3.00. Students reported moderate rather than elevated stress, and H1 was retained.

The two components of H2 diverged. Emotional stability fell significantly below its midpoint, $t(99) = -2.13$, $p = .036$, $d = -0.21$, indicating a small but reliable prevalence of emotional instability. Self-acceptance was significantly above its midpoint, $t(99) = 4.45$, $p < .001$, $d = 0.45$. Because H2 asserted that neither construct falls significantly below its midpoint, and emotional stability did so, H2 was rejected on the basis of the emotional stability comparison.

Academic Stress and Emotional Stability (H3)

Academic stress correlated significantly and negatively with emotional stability, $r = -.200$, $p = .046$, 95% CI [-.38, -.00], accounting for 4.0% of the variance. H3 was rejected: students reporting greater academic stress reported lower emotional stability. The effect is small by Cohen's (1988) conventions and the upper bound of its confidence interval approaches zero, so the association is best characterized as reliable but modest.

Two supplementary relationships merit note. Academic stress correlated considerably more strongly with self-acceptance, $r = -.427$, $p < .001$, than with emotional stability. Emotional stability and self-acceptance correlated positively and moderately strongly, $r = .564$, $p < .001$, consistent with the meta-analytic literature on personality and well-being (DeNeve & Cooper, 1998; Steel et al., 2008).

Academic Stress as a Predictor of Self-Acceptance (H4)

Table 3 reports the regression predicting self-acceptance from academic stress, alongside a supplementary model predicting emotional stability.

Table 3 Simple Linear Regressions Predicting Self-Acceptance and Emotional Stability from Academic Stress

Criterion and predictor	B	SE B	Beta	t	p	95% CI for B
Self-acceptance						
Constant	5.807	0.416	--	13.97	< .001	[4.98, 6.63]
Academic stress	-0.637	0.136	-.427	-4.68	< .001	[-0.91, -0.37]
Emotional stability						

Criterion and predictor	B	SE B	Beta	t	p	95% CI for B
Constant	3.527	0.339	--	10.40	< .001	[2.85, 4.20]
Academic stress	-0.224	0.111	-.200	-2.02	.046	[-0.44, -0.00]

Note. Self-acceptance model: R^2 = .183, adjusted R^2 = .174, F(1, 98) = 21.90, p < .001. Emotional stability model: R^2 = .040, adjusted R^2 = .030, F(1, 98) = 4.07, p = .046.

Academic stress accounted for 18.3% of the variance in self-acceptance and significantly predicted it, $F(1, 98) = 21.90$, $p < .001$, beta = -.427, so H4 was rejected. The unstandardized coefficient indicates that each one-point increase in mean perceived academic stress corresponds to a decrease of approximately 0.64 points in mean self-acceptance on the six-point response scale. The supplementary model shows the parallel effect on emotional stability to be roughly one quarter as large.

Demographic Differences (H5)

Table 4 reports all nine subgroup comparisons. No comparison reached significance, and H5a, H5b, and H5c were all retained. Age was likewise unrelated to academic stress, $r = .09$, $p = .402$, emotional stability, $r = .13$, $p = .201$, and self-acceptance, $r = -.07$, $p = .478$.

Table 4 Demographic Subgroup Comparisons for the Three Study Variables

Comparison	Academic stress	Emotional stability	Self-acceptance
Gender (n = 98)			
Female (n = 70), M (SD)	2.91 (0.63)	2.81 (0.71)	4.02 (0.93)
Male (n = 28), M (SD)	3.11 (0.42)	3.02 (0.58)	3.69 (0.74)
t(96)	-1.55	-1.38	1.63
p	.124	.171	.106
d	-0.35	-0.31	0.37
Year of study (N = 100)			
1st year (n = 17), M	3.09	2.99	3.83
2nd year (n = 17), M	2.66	3.04	4.42
3rd year (n = 22), M	3.00	2.59	3.75
4th year or later (n = 44), M	3.08	2.87	3.80
F(3, 96)	2.32	1.79	2.41
p	.080	.155	.071
Eta squared	.068	.053	.070
Faculty (N = 100)			
Business and Management (n = 37), M	3.04	2.88	3.86
Humanities and Social Sciences (n = 36), M	2.96	2.74	3.87
Health and Applied Sciences (n = 16), M	2.89	3.05	4.12
Engineering and IT (n = 11), M	3.08	2.88	3.81
F(3, 96)	0.33	0.80	0.41
p	.804	.499	.750
Eta squared	.010	.024	.012

Note. All entries are per-item means. The two participants who preferred not to disclose gender were excluded from the gender comparison. Standard deviations for the year of study and faculty groups are omitted for space and are available from the author.

Two null results warrant qualification. The gender comparison on academic stress was non-significant, $p = .124$, with male students reporting numerically higher stress, which runs opposite to the direction reported by Brougham et al. (2009) and Graves et al. (2021). With only 28 male participants this comparison is underpowered, and the apparent reversal should not be read as a substantive finding. Academic stress and self-acceptance both approached significance across year of study, $p = .080$ and $p = .071$, with eta squared values near .07 indicating medium-sized effects the present sample was insufficiently powered to detect reliably. In both cases the second-year cohort was the outlier, reporting the lowest stress and the highest self-acceptance. This pattern is not the progressive decline across academic stage reported by Misra and McKean (2000).

DISCUSSION

Three of the five null hypotheses were rejected. Perceived academic stress sat precisely at the neutral scale midpoint, yet it correlated negatively with emotional stability and accounted for 18.3% of the variance in self-acceptance. Emotional stability itself fell significantly below its midpoint. No demographic variable produced a significant difference on any measure.

Stress at Ordinary Levels Carries Measurable Cost

The sample mean of 2.99 places these students between the two strands of the existing literature: the results neither replicate the acute distress documented by Barbayannis et al. (2022) and Perez-Jorge et al. (2025), nor support the low-stress profile suggested by Travis et al. (2023) and Wiklund et al. (2020). The observed dispersion matters more than the mean. Individual totals ranged from 27 to 86 on a scale bounded at 18 and 90, so the aggregate conceals substantial variation, and a meaningful minority of students sit well above the neutral point. From the perspective of the transactional model this is expected: because stress arises from appraisal rather than from objective demand, students in broadly comparable academic environments report widely differing strain according to how they evaluate their coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

This finding qualifies the stress-buffering account. Cohen and Wills (1985) proposed that the psychological costs of stressors emerge mainly under conditions of high, acute distress. The present results indicate that for self-evaluative outcomes the threshold is lower than assumed: at a sample mean sitting exactly on the scale midpoint, academic stress was already the strongest correlate of self-acceptance measured here. Practically, waiting for students to present as acutely stressed before intervening may mean intervening after self-worth has already been affected.

Why the Cost Falls on Self-Acceptance Rather Than Trait Stability

The contrast between H3 and H4 is the most theoretically informative result of the study. Academic stress explained 4.0% of the variance in emotional stability but 18.3% of the variance in self-acceptance, a more than fourfold difference within a single sample using a single predictor.

Rogers' (1961) conditions-of-worth mechanism explains the asymmetry directly. Where individuals have made positive self-regard contingent on meeting external standards, difficulty in that domain functions as evidence against their own adequacy rather than as a neutral external obstacle. Academic performance is the domain in which undergraduates are most continuously and publicly evaluated, and therefore the domain most likely to have been

internalized as a condition of worth. Trait emotional reactivity, being dispositional, offers no comparable pathway. The small magnitude of the emotional stability association is itself consistent with the Five-Factor Model, which conceptualizes traits as enduring structures comparatively resistant to situational fluctuation (Costa & McCrae, 1992; McCrae & Costa, 2008). The finding thus supports both the claim that academic stress registers in emotional functioning and the claim that trait architecture is largely insulated from it.

The divergent prevalence results follow the same logic. Students showed measurable emotional reactivity while retaining a broadly positive view of themselves, which suggests they are under strain but have not, in aggregate, converted that strain into a wholesale negative verdict on the self. The small effect size for emotional instability (d = -0.21) indicates a shortfall that is statistically reliable but modest, and it should not be characterized as clinical.

These results support treating psychological well-being as differentiated rather than composite. A study aggregating trait and self-evaluative dimensions into a single well-being index would have obtained an intermediate correlation misrepresenting both relationships.

Absence of Demographic Variation

Neither gender, year of study, faculty, nor age accounted for significant variation in any study variable, so the central findings are not attributable to demographic composition. This has a direct practical consequence: no identifiable subgroup in this sample offers an efficient target for concentrated support. Screening on demographic proxies would be ineffective, and institutions would do better to screen on the psychological variables themselves.

Implications for Practice

Because measurable associations with well-being were present at moderate stress levels, institutions should not treat the absence of visible distress as evidence that workload is well calibrated. Coordinating major assignment deadlines, publishing clear grading rubrics, and providing early formative feedback all act on the appraisal process the transactional model identifies as the operative mechanism.

Given that self-acceptance proved considerably more sensitive to academic stress than trait emotional stability, it merits inclusion as an explicit outcome measure in institutional well-being monitoring rather than being folded into a global index. Interventions grounded in humanistic and acceptance-based approaches, which work directly on decoupling self-worth from performance outcomes, address the mechanism these data implicate most strongly.

Limitations

Several limitations qualify these conclusions. First, the cross-sectional design cannot establish direction. Students low in emotional stability or self-acceptance may appraise academic demands as more threatening, rather than academic stress reducing these outcomes, and a reciprocal relationship is equally consistent with the data. The regression language of prediction is statistical, not causal.

Second, the non-probability convenience sample of 100 students drawn from multiple countries and institutions limits generalizability, skews toward female respondents at 70%, and leaves institutional context uncontrolled. Third, several demographic cells were small, most notably 11 participants in the Engineering and Information Technology cluster and 28

male participants, so the retention of H5 reflects an absence of detectable evidence rather than evidence of absence. The two comparisons approaching significance may well be real effects this sample could not detect. Fourth, although nine subgroup tests invite multiplicity concerns, no result approached the Bonferroni-corrected threshold of alpha = .006, so multiplicity does not affect the conclusions drawn; the three rejected hypotheses were each tested once and specified in advance.

Fifth, all variables relied on self-report, which is susceptible to social desirability bias, acquiescence bias, and common method variance. Because I measured all three constructs in a single instrument at a single sitting, some portion of the observed intercorrelation may reflect shared method rather than shared construct. Sixth, the study did not control for social support, sleep quality, financial circumstances, prior mental health history, or coping style, any of which could account for part of the association between academic stress and self-acceptance.

Finally, two reverse-scoring errors required correction before analysis. The fact that an internally consistent but incorrectly oriented composite (alpha = .79) survived initial scoring illustrates that reliability statistics alone do not verify polarity. Researchers working with reverse-keyed instruments should anchor scoring against external criteria rather than relying on internal consistency.

Future Directions

Longitudinal and multi-wave designs would allow the stress and self-acceptance relationship to be tested as within-person change and would begin to resolve the directionality question this design cannot address. Mediation and moderation models should test whether coping style or social support mediates the relationship and whether emotional stability moderates it, since the differential effect sizes observed here suggest a mediated pathway worth modeling explicitly. Hierarchical regression entering demographics at step one and academic stress at step two would establish incremental variance attributable to stress. Larger and more balanced samples ($N >= 300$) would permit adequately powered subgroup analysis and factorial designs examining interactions such as gender by academic stage. Finally, because the Perception of Academic Stress Scale contains distinguishable sub-domains covering expectations, workload, and self-perception, testing these separately would identify which facets of academic strain drive the association with self-acceptance.

CONCLUSION

Undergraduates in this study experienced ordinary rather than exceptional levels of academic stress, yet that ordinary stress was already associated with reduced emotional stability and substantially reduced self-acceptance. The finding argues against a threshold model of academic strain in which intervention becomes warranted only once distress turns acute. Sustaining student well-being depends less on responding to crisis than on attending to the everyday relationship between academic demand and how students come to regard themselves.

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Conflict of Interest

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APPENDIX A

Correlation Matrix for All Variables Entered into the Analyses

Table A1 Means, Standard Deviations, and Intercorrelations Among Study Variables

Variable	M	SD	1	2	3	4	5
1. Age (years)	22.59	3.82	--				
2. Gender	0.29	0.45	.24*	--			
3. Academic stress	2.99	0.60	.09	.16	--		
4. Emotional stability	2.86	0.68	.13	.14	-.20*	--	
5. Self-acceptance	3.90	0.90	-.07	-.16	-.43***	.56***	--

*Note. N = 100, except for correlations involving gender (n = 98), which exclude the two participants who preferred not to disclose gender. Gender is dummy coded (0 = female, 1 = male), so its mean represents the proportion of male participants. Academic stress and emotional stability are per-item means on 5-point scales; self-acceptance is a per-item mean on a 6-point scale. * p < .05. *** p < .001.*