IJRAR.ORG E-ISSN: 2348-1269, P-ISSN: 2349-5138

INTERNATIONAL JOURNAL OF RESEARCH AND ANALYTICAL REVIEWS (IJRAR) | IJRAR.ORG

An International Open Access, Peer-reviewed, Refereed Journal

RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN PERCEIVED STRESS, PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING, AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG UNDERGRADUATE STUDENTS

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Abstract :
Undergraduate students are constantly exposed to academic, social, and personal stresses, all of which can have an impact on their mental health and general wellbeing. This literature review investigates the Relationship between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among undergraduate students, using empirical studies published between 2015 and 2025. Perceived stress, defined as a subjective assessment of life conditions as overwhelming or unmanageable, has been repeatedly linked to negative psychological outcomes. In contrast, psychological well-being (which includes autonomy, personal growth, environmental mastery, and meaningful connections) acts as a protective factor, promoting resilience and adaptive coping strategies. Life satisfaction, which is a cognitive assessment of one's total quality of life, is directly related to stress and well-being. The evaluated literature suggests a strong negative relationship between perceived stress and both psychological well-being and life satisfaction, whereas psychological well-being has a positive relationship with life satisfaction. Furthermore, evidence suggests that psychological well-being may mediate the effect of stress on life satisfaction. The findings emphasise the need for integrated mental health measures in higher education settings that address stress management and promote optimal psychological functioning.

Keywords: Perceived stress, Psychological well-being, Life satisfaction, Undergraduate students, Mental health

INTRODUCTION

The university years are a crucial period of human development that is marked by social shifts, academic pressures, and the establishment of lifelong personal and professional identities. Students frequently have to adjust to new academic settings, handle more responsibility, and grow independent of family support networks during this time. University students are especially susceptible to mental health issues like stress, anxiety, and decreased life satisfaction as a result of these changes, which can cause significant psychological strain. Research regularly shows that rising academic rivalry, financial strains, and societal expectations related to higher education have made undergraduate students' mental health a global problem.(Liu & Wang, 2024).
Because it represents how people perceive and react to stresses in their surroundings, perceived stress is one of the psychological variables in student populations that has been studied the most. Perceived stress, in contrast to objective stressors, is the subjective assessment of circumstances as overpowering or unmanageable. The idea places a strong emphasis on individual assessment processes, which means that depending on psychological resilience and coping mechanisms, comparable circumstances may be interpreted

in various ways. According to research, university students' perceived stress is closely linked to emotional suffering, lower academic engagement, and worse mental health outcomes (Huang et al., 2024).

Students are frequently exposed to a variety of stressors throughout the transition from secondary school to university, such as academic workload, exams, financial worries, job uncertainty, and interpersonal difficulties. Increased perceived stress levels might result from the accumulation of certain stressors. Perceived stress has a major impact on students' sleep quality, emotional stability, and psychological functioning, according to studies with huge student samples. For instance, a study involving over 8,000 college students discovered a robust correlation between higher levels of perceived stress and depressed symptoms and poor sleep quality, suggesting that stress is a major factor in the mental health outcomes of students(Huang et al., 2024).

Another crucial concept in comprehending undergraduate students' mental health is psychological well-being. Positive psychological functioning is referred to as psychological well-being, and it includes elements like self-acceptance, autonomy, personal development, mastery of the environment, a sense of purpose in life, and positive interactions with others. It shows how happy people are with themselves and how well they can handle obstacles in life. Higher psychological well-being has been linked to resilience, adaptive coping mechanisms, and better academic achievement among college students, according to research(Salman et al., 2025).

The adverse effects of stress on people are reduced by psychological well-being. Strong psychological well-being makes students more emotionally stable and more prepared to handle social and academic stresses. Research has demonstrated that elements including resilience, good coping mechanisms, and perceived social support play a major role in university populations' psychological well-being. Students are more likely to have better mental health and be less susceptible to stress-related issues when they feel supported by peers, family, and institutional resources (Salman et al., 2025).

Life satisfaction is another important aspect of psychological functioning that is commonly recognized as a basic component of subjective well-being. Life satisfaction is an individual's cognitive judgment of their entire life circumstances, reflecting the degree to which people are satisfied with their lives. Academic accomplishment, social relationships, financial stability, and mental health status all have an impact on college students' life satisfaction. According to research, life satisfaction is strongly linked to psychological well-being and emotional health, making it an essential indication of total quality of life (Elsayed, 2025).

In recent years, academics have paid greater attention to the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among university students. Higher perceived stress levels are linked to reduced life satisfaction, according to research. Students who see their academic and personal commitments as overpowering are less likely to rate their life positively. A cross-sectional study of university students revealed a substantial negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction, emphasizing the need of stress management in boosting student well-being (Elsayed, 2025).

Psychological well-being is also a significant influence in life satisfaction. Psychological well-being influences people's capacity to keep a good attitude toward life and effectively manage stress. Recent research on university students discovered that psychological well-being mediates the relationship between psychological factors and life satisfaction, implying that improving well-being can lead to greater satisfaction with academic and personal life Psychological well-being is also a significant influence in life satisfaction. Psychological well-being influences people's capacity to keep a good attitude toward life and effectively manage stress. Recent research on university students discovered that psychological well-being mediates the relationship between psychological factors and life satisfaction, implying that improving well-being can lead to greater satisfaction with academic and personal life (İrfan Akkoç et al,2025).

Today's university students are exposed to a variety of environmental and technological influences that may have an impact on their stress levels and overall well-being. Digital technology, social media use, and academic competitiveness have increased pressure on students to perform and retain social relationships. Some research have investigated how modern lifestyle characteristics interact with psychological stress and well-being, finding that behavioral patterns such as excessive internet use may contribute to higher stress levels among young adults (Belal et al., 2025).

Recent global study has also revealed an increasing prevalence of mental health difficulties among university students. Surveys carried out in several nations show that a significant proportion of students endure moderate to severe stress, anxiety, and emotional discomfort during their academic years. These psychological issues are frequently linked to academic pressure, financial insecurity, and anxieties about future job prospects. Such findings highlight the necessity for research exploring the psychological elements that influence student well-being and life satisfaction (Suresh & Dar,2025).

Therefor,the relationship between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction is a critical field of study in modern psychology. Understanding how these variables interact can provide useful information about undergraduate students' mental health experiences. Several studies have indicated that perceived stress negatively affects both psychological well-being and life satisfaction; however, psychological well-being may act as a protective factor that helps individuals maintain positive life evaluations despite experiencing stress (Elsayed, 2025; Huang et al., 2024).
Additionally, researchers have highlighted how personality factors and coping mechanisms can affect the link between stress and life satisfaction. Even in stressful situations, students who use adaptive coping techniques like problem-solving, emotional control, and reaching out for social support typically report better levels of life satisfaction. Maladaptive coping mechanisms, on the other hand, can worsen stress and lower wellbeing. These results demonstrate the intricate interactions between psychological factors that affect students' general quality of life (Elsayed, 2025).
Examining the connections between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among undergraduates is crucial given the rising incidence of stress and mental health issues among college students. Educators, mental health specialists, and legislators can create interventions that support students' academic achievement and well-being by having a better understanding of these connections. Researchers can find protective factors that boost resilience and improve university students' general mental health by examining how stress affects psychological functioning and life satisfaction (Liu & Wang, 2024).

METHODOLOGY

Study Design

This study used a narrative review technique to synthesise the current empirical and theoretical literature on the relationship between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among undergraduate students. A narrative review was considered appropriate to integrate findings from diverse study designs, to provide a comprehensive understanding of how these psychological variables influence students' mental health and overall well-being.

Search Strategy

A comprehensive literature search was conducted using combinations of the following keywords: Perceived stress, Psychological well-being, Life satisfaction, Undergraduate students, Mental health.
The search for eligible studies was conducted via the following databases: Google Scholar, ResearchGate, Scopus, and Science direct ensuring inclusion of studies examining the relationship between perceived stress, psychological well-being and life satisfaction among undergraduate students. Original research, review, early and meeting abstracts were eligible for inclusion.
Studies published between 2015 and 2025 that examined perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction or related psychosocial variables among undergraduate students were included in the review and excluded the articles unrelated to psychological variables or studies addressing only clinical psychiatric disorders without reference to stress, well-being, or life satisfaction, and publications lacking theoretical or empirical relevance to the review objectives were excluded from the present review.

Study selection

Approximately 130 articles were identified through searches. Excluded irrelevant to the study as per the inclusion and exclusion criteria. Studies meeting the criteria were selected for the inclusion in final stage.

Data Extraction and Synthesis

Key information from the selected studies, including study objectives, sample characteristics, measurement tools, and major findings, was extracted and systematically reviewed. The findings were analyzed qualitatively and organized thematically under major domains such as perceived stress, psychological well-being, life satisfaction, and the interrelationship among these variables.

RESULT

Perceived Stress among Undergraduate Students

Perceived stress is widely recognized as a common psychological experience among university students. Academic pressure, examinations, social adjustment, and financial responsibilities are major stressors that contribute to increased stress levels within this population. Studies indicate that perceived stress among university students is a significant public health concern because it negatively affects mental health and academic functioning. A systematic review examining stress among university students reported that perceived stress is associated with reduced psychological health and academic performance (Girum Nakie et al.,2025).

Research indicates that emerging adulthood, typically between the ages of 18 and 25, is a developmental stage associated with identity exploration, increased independence, and increased vulnerability to stress. The transition to university requires students to adapt to new academic and social environments, which can lead to significant psychological pressure if proper coping resources are lacking (Branje et al., 2021; Girelli et al., 2018).

Students often perceive academic demands such as coursework, deadlines, and examinations overwhelming, especially when combined with personal and social challenges. Research also indicates that students may experience emotional distress, loneliness, and interpersonal difficulties when they lack effective coping resources to manage these stressors (Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015; Wu et al., 2015)

While these studies differ in emphasis ranging from broad systematic evidence to developmental and contextual analyses—they together indicate that perceived stress is shaped not only by academic demands but also by developmental transitions, social environments, and individual coping resources. However, the use of cross-sectional designs, self-reported measures, and context-specific samples across several studies limits the ability to establish causal relationships and generalize findings across diverse university populations (Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015; Wu et al., 2015; Branje et al., 2021).

Psychological Well-Being among Undergraduate Students

Psychological well-being is widely recognized as a core dimension of positive mental health and reflects individuals' ability to function effectively while maintaining emotional stability and meaningful life engagement. Psychological well-being is particularly important among undergraduate students, because university life involves significant developmental transitions including academic demands, social adjustment, and increasing independence.

Studies indicate that psychological well-being during university years influences students' academic performance, emotional adjustment, and long-term personal development (Liu et al., 2019). Psychological well-being is commonly conceptualized as a multidimensional concept consisting of self-acceptance, autonomy, environmental mastery, personal growth, purpose in life, and positive interpersonal relationships, all of which contribute to individuals' psychological functioning and resilience in challenging environments (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015).

Particularly research examining undergraduate populations reveals that psychological well-being is shaped by both individual and environmental factors. Supportive academic environments, meaningful engagement with university activities, and positive peer relationships have been found to promote higher levels of psychological well-being among students (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015). Similarly, studies focusing on Asian university populations report that psychological well-being is positively associated with resilience, social support, and adaptive coping strategies, indicating that students who possess stronger coping mechanism tend to demonstrate better psychological functioning (Abdullah et al., 2024). However, while these findings highlight the protective role of resilience and social support, the cross-sectional nature of many studies limits the ability to establish causal relationships between these factors and psychological well-being (Abdullah et al., 2024).

According to research the impact of loneliness and self-disclosure among university students found that increased levels of loneliness and psychological stress were associated with reduced psychological well-being, while open communication and supportive social relationships were linked to improved psychological functioning (Le et al., 2025). Although these findings highlight the importance of interpersonal relationships in promoting well-being, the study primarily used self-reported data, which may introduce response bias and limit the accuracy of psychological assessments (Le et al., 2025).

Critically, analysis across studies report that psychological well-being among undergraduate students is influenced by a complex interaction of psychological resources, social environments, and stress management strategies, the mechanism changes in their emphasis.Some studies emphasize the importance of positive university experiences and psychological flexibility (Mazzucchelli and Purcell, 2015) while other studies focus more specifically on resilience, interpersonal communication, loneliness and social support as protective factors against stress and in determining students' psychological health (Le et al.2025 ; Thanoi et al. 2023) .Despite these differences in focus, the studies collectively suggest that psychological well-being is closely linked to students' ability to manage stress and maintain supportive relationships.

Life Satisfaction among Undergraduate Students

Life satisfaction is an individual's cognitive evaluation of the quality of their life according to personal expectations and standards. It is widely recognized as a major component of subjective well-being and reflects individuals' overall judgments about their life circumstances. Among undergraduate students, life satisfaction is particularly important because it reflects students' perceptions of their academic experiences, social relationships, personal development, and future prospects (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015)

Researchers highlight that , higher levels of stress lower students' life satisfaction proportionally. According to recent research, this link is controlled by coping strategies and personality traits (conscientiousness and agreeableness), with adaptive coping lessening the negative influence of stress on life satisfaction. (El Sayed, 2025).

Research during the COVID-19 pandemic indicates that increased stress negatively impacts students' life satisfaction, while emotional resilience helps maintain happiness despite stress (Hu et al., 2022). Additionally, studies show that campus factors like perceived walkability and socio-psychological environment indirectly affect mental health and life satisfaction, highlighting new aspects of subjective well-being linked to growth and social contexts (Zhang et al., 2024).

Psychological factors such as mental health conditions like depression and anxiety, Also play an important role in determining life satisfaction among undergraduate students. Longitudinal research indicates that higher levels of psychological distress including depression and anxiety, correlate with lower satisfaction and overall well-being in university life (Liu & Wang, 2024).

However, limitations are evident across the reviewed studies. Many studies rely on self-reported measures of stress, coping strategies, psychological distress, and life satisfaction, which may introduce response bias and affect the accuracy of reported experiences (El Sayed, 2025; Liu & Wang, 2024). While other research is often focused within specific cultural or institutional contexts, which may limit the generalizability of findings to broader student populations (Mazzucchelli & Purcell, 2015; Zhang et al., 2024). Furthermore, despite the presence of longitudinal approaches in some studies, much of the literature still depends on correlational analyses that may not capture all contextual elements influencing students' life satisfaction (Liu & Wang, 2024; Zhang et al., 2024).

Integrated relationship between Perceived Stress , psychological well-being and life satisfaction

The relationship between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among undergraduate students has been widely examined in psychological research. Synthesizing findings across empirical studies indicates that these variables are closely interconnected, where perceived stress generally functions as a negative predictor of both psychological well-being and life satisfaction, while psychological well-being serves as an important positive determinant of life satisfaction (Diener et al., 2018; Pascoe et al., 2020). As a result students who experience higher levels of perceived stress tend to report poorer psychological functioning and reduced satisfaction with life, highlighting the importance of understanding the dynamic interactions among these constructs.

Perceived stress has consistently been associated with lower psychological well-being among university students. High stress levels can negatively influence students' sense of environmental mastery and autonomy, which are central components of psychological well-being. Studies examining university populations have demonstrated that students experiencing elevated stress levels often report lower levels of psychological well-being due to increased anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced coping capacity (Beiter et al., 2015; Denovan & Macaskill, 2016).

At the same time, perceived stress is also negatively associated with life satisfaction, by affecting individuals' cognitive evaluation of their overall quality of life, and High stress levels can increase negative emotions and diminish positive experiences, with academic stress,financial pressures, and uncertainty about careers

contributing to reduced happiness and fulfillment. (Diener et al., 2018 ;Pascoe et al., 2020). When stress becomes chronic, it may lead to persistent dissatisfaction with academic and personal life domains.
Synthesizing research findings further suggests that psychological well-being plays a crucial mediating role in the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Students with higher psychological well-being tend to demonstrate greater resilience and adaptive coping strategies when faced with stressful situations. As a result, they are better able to maintain positive evaluations of their lives despite experiencing academic or personal stress while psychological well-being may buffer the negative impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction with students possess strong psychological resources (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Extremera & Rey, 2016; Diener et al., 2018).
In addition, the synthesized literature demonstrates that perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction operate within an interconnected psychological framework. Higher perceived stress tends to undermine psychological well-being and reduce life satisfaction, whereas strong psychological well-being can mitigate the adverse effects of stress and promote greater life satisfaction among undergraduate students (Denovan & Macaskill, 2016; Pascoe et al., 2020). Understanding these relationships is therefore essential for developing interventions that enhance student mental health and promote well-being within higher education settings.

DISCUSSION

The findings from this reviewed literature indicate that perceived stress plays a significant role in determining psychological well-being and life satisfaction among undergraduate students. The consistent negative relationship observed across studies suggests that stress management is crucial for maintaining students' mental health and overall quality of life. Research has consistently shown that higher levels of perceived stress are associated with poorer psychological functioning and lower levels of subjective well-being among university students (Pascoe, Hetrick, & Parker, 2020; Freire, Ferradás, Núñez, & Valle, 2020).
University students face a broader range of academic and social challenges that can increase stress levels. Academic workload, examinations, financial pressures, and adaptation to new social environments often contribute to elevated stress levels among students. When students perceive these challenges as overwhelming, their psychological well-being may deteriorate, leading to emotional distress, reduced motivation, and lower life satisfaction (Girelli et al., 2018; Branje et al., 2021). Studies examining student mental health have reported thatcontinuous exposure to stress can negatively influence emotional regulation and psychological adjustment among young adults (Pascoe et al., 2020).
The current literatures also indicates that perceived stress negatively influences life satisfaction among undergraduate students. Students who experience increased stress levels tend to report lower satisfaction with their academic experiences, relationships, and overall quality of life. Previous studies have confirmed that perceived stress significantly predicts lower levels of life satisfaction and happiness among university students (Çivitci, 2015; Freire et al., 2020). Similarly, research has shown that students experiencing consistent stress may develop negative cognitive aappraisal about their lives, which eventually reduces their sense of life satisfaction (Elsayed, 2025).
Another important finding from this review is the role of coping mechanisms and social resources in reducing the impact of stress. Students who utilize adaptive coping strategies such as problem-focused coping, seeking social support, and emotional regulation tend to maintain better psychological well-being even when experiencing stress (Freire et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2020). Social support from peers, family members, and university communities has also been found to act as a protective factor that reduces the negative psychological effects of stress (Girelli et al., 2018).
The review also highlights the importance of institutional support in promoting student well-being. Universities can play a significant role in reducing student stress by providing mental health services, counseling support, and programs aimed at enhancing resilience and coping skills. Research indicates that campus environments that foster social connectedness and belonging contribute positively to students' psychological well-being and life satisfaction (Branje et al., 2021; Freire et al., 2020).
Despite the growing body of research on this topic, certain gaps remain in the literature. Many studies primarily focus on cross-sectional designs, which limits the ability to determine causal relationships between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction. Additionally, much of the existing literature has been conducted in Western contexts, and more research is needed to understand how cultural and social factors influence these relationships among students in different regions (Pascoe et al., 2020).Therefore, further research is required to explore the integrated relationship among perceived stress, psychological well-being, and life satisfaction among undergraduate students in different cultural and educational contexts.

Understanding these relationships may contribute to the development of effective interventions aimed at promoting student mental health and well-being.

Overall, the of literature suggests that perceived stress is a critical determinant of both psychological well-being and life satisfaction among undergraduate students. Addressing stress through effective coping strategies, social support systems, and institutional interventions may significantly enhance students' psychological health and overall life satisfaction (Freire et al., 2020; Pascoe et al., 2020).

CONCLUSION

The present collection of research reveals a complicated but continuous pattern: perceived stress lowers psychological well-being and life satisfaction; psychological well-being increases life satisfaction; and individual differences in coping, personality, and resilience modify these associations. Understanding these interactions is critical for creating tailored interventions that promote student mental health and improve subjective well-being in academic environments.

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