

Effective Approaches To Stress Reduction Among University Students In Albania

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Key words: Stress level, university students, psycho-social factors, student health, academic stress, etc.	Abstract Introduction: University students in Albania face a multitude of stress factors that suffer with a number of stress factors that affect their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. This comprehensive analysis explores the primary sources of stress among university students, including academic workload, financial difficulties, social pressures, and career uncertainties. The study aims to provide a deeper understanding of these stress factors and offers recommendations for reducing their negative impact, focusing on improving student support systems and mental health services within Albanian universities. The purpose of the paper: The purpose of this paper is to research, analyze concrete problems encounter regarding stress levels in their daily lives and provide practical recommendations. Methodology: This study employs a quantitative research approach using a standardized stress questionnaire. Data were collected through an online survey distributed to a randomly selected sample of university students across Albania, including a significant number of participants to ensure e broad representation. The sample size included a significant number of participants to guarantee reliable results. Findings: The analysis identifies significant stressors affecting students, such as high academic demands, financial constraints, social expectations, and career-related concerns. Based on these findings, the study recommends enhancing student support systems, developing stress management programs, and improving mental health services within universities to better address these challenges and support student well-being.
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INTRODUCTION

Over the last decade, there has been increasing attention to investigating the risk factors of stress and its consequences on well-being among university student. (Stallman HM, Hurst CP., 2016;51:128–34). Stress and mental health among university students are critical public health issues. Healthy students are likely to become healthy workers in the future. While university participation has the potential to be a positive and fulfilling experience, empirical evidence suggests that being a student can also be a stressful. (Chambel MJ, Curral L., 2005;54(1):135–47).

Academic stressors inculde high workload, attending lectures, meeting deadlines, balancing university and personal life, and financial issues. All associated with greater distress and reduced academic achievement. (Misra R, McKean M., 2000;16:41–51).

According to Hilger-Kolb, Diehl, Herr, and Loerbroks, the vast majority of these measures lack a theoretical model of stress. This may represent a significant limitation, as stress measures based on a

shared, tested model could better help researchers capture the connections between stress and health among university students and develop theory-based interventions. (Dyrbye LN, Thomas MR, Shanafelt TD., 2006;81(4):354–73).

The effort-reward imbalance model, where high efforts are met with low rewards, is a valid stress model generating negative emotions and sustained stress experiences. (Siegrist J., 1996;1(1):27–41).

According to this model, student stress results from an imbalance between efforts, such as high study load, and rewards, such as recognition from supervisors.

Experiencing Stress Among Students

Stress negatively impacts various aspects of human life: physical, psychological, and social. Acute or chronic stress triggers syndromes like sleep disorders, stress-related depression, and chronic fatigue syndrome, reducing life expectancy and quality of life. (Uszyński M.; 2009. p. 11, 56).

Stress is a state of inadequacy between our needs and external demands. (Levi L., 1996).

The university period is particularly stressful due to separation from family, high personal expectations, time pressures, academic overload, exams, financial limitations, and lack of leisure activities. (Sharp J, Theiler S., 2018;40:193–212).

While moderate stress can motivate productivity, excessive stress harms physical and psychological well-being. (Asani M, Farouk Z, Gambo S., 2016;13:55–8).

Stress among students is also linked to risky behaviors such as smoking and substance abuse, as well as lower academic achievement. (Tavolacci MP, Ladner J, Grigioni S, Richard L, Villet H, Dechelotte P., 2013;13:724).

This study aims to determine the prevalence and factors associated with high perceived stress among university students in Albania.

Factors Leading to Increased Stress Among Students

Environmental factors like specialization, living situation, social support, and campus resources are critical explanatory variables of stress. Studies show that students with lower social support have higher stress levels. (Collings R., Seanson V., and Watkins R., 2014).

Mental health problems, the leading cause of disability globally, are closely linked to increased academic stress among university students. (Wittchen HU, Jacobi F, Rehm J, et al., 2011;21:655–79).

Academic stress is perceived as exceeding students' resources and threatening their well-being. Key stress sources include attending classes, academic overload, deadlines, assessments, financial demands, social pressures, and balancing university and private life. (Pitt A, Oprescu F, Tapia G, et al., 2018;19:61–75).

Mental health and psychological problems, if left unrecognized can result in failing exams or even dropping out of university or college. (Ngjela J. Et al, 2023)

Sources of Stress in Students

Stress arises from situations triggering negative thoughts or emotions. Students often struggle to manage tense situations, experiencing isolation, tension, and anxiety. A 2001 National Health Assessment found that 76% of students felt overwhelmed, and 22% struggled to function due to depression. Stress significantly impacts academic performance and health, with many students attributing stress to school-related issues, financial problems, and relationship difficulties. (Bulo G. & Sanches M. G. (2014). Sources of Stress Among College Students, CVCITS Research Journal, 1, 1, 16-25).

METHODOLOGY OF THE STUDY

For the realization of this study, a quantitative research method was employed. The questionnaire is structured based on previous international and national studies on this issue. Data were collected from 507 participants in Albania through random sampling from June 2023 to June 2024. The study explores relationships between multiple tasks, conflict situations, fear of not managing goals, feeling tense, and pressure from others as predictors of stress-related outcomes.

Research Questions and Hypotheses

The research questions aimed at obtaining answers during the study are as follows:

1. How does having multiple tasks affect your feeling tense?

2. How do conflict situations impact the accumulation of problems?
3. How does fear of not managing goals influence feelings of discouragement?
4. How does feeling tense affect fear for the future?
5. How does pressure from others affect feeling overloaded with responsibilities?

Based on the research problem and its objectives, this study aims to test the following main hypothesis and sub-hypotheses:

Main Hypothesis: Multiple tasks, conflict situations, fear of not managing goals, feeling tense, and pressure from others impact feelings of tension, accumulated problems, discouragement, fear for the future, and the feeling overloaded with responsibilities.

Sub-Hypotheses:

1. Multiple tasks affect the reaction of feeling tense.
2. Conflict situations impact accumulated problems.
3. Fear of not managing goals influences discouragement.
4. Feeling tense influences fear for the future.
5. Pressure from others impacts feeling overloaded with responsibilities.

Independent Variables: Multiple tasks, conflict situations, fear of not managing goals, feeling tense, pressure from others.

Dependent Variables: Feeling tense, accumulated problems, discouragement, fear for the future, feeling overloaded with responsibilities

Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained prior to distributing the questionnaire. Participants were informed about the study's purpose, confidentiality assurance, and their right to withdraw at any stage. Data were securely stored and accessed only by researchers.

RESULTS

Demographic information

The study included 507 participants, 88.8% female and 11.2% male. Most participants (91.7%) were aged 18-29 years, with the majority holding a Bachelor's degree (83.3%). Financial status varied, with 50.5% reporting medium financial status, 34.5% good, 6.9% low, and 8.1% very good. (Table 1 provides detailed demographic information.)

Table 1 Demographic information of the population in the study

Demographic Variable	Category	n (507)	%
Gender	Female	420	88.8
	Male	57	11.2
Age	18-29	465	91.7
	30-39	32	6.3
	40-49	10	2
Education	Bachelor's system	425	83.8
	Master's	79	15.6
	Doctorate	3	0.6
Financial status	Low	35	6.9
	Medium	256	50.5
	Good	175	34.5
	Very good	41	8.1
Living with family	Yes	296	58.4

	No	211	41.6
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The table below provides information on the sleeping hours of the study participants.

It shows that 62.9% of participants sleep less than seven hours per night, while 37.1% sleep more than seven hours per night. (Figure 2)

Sleeping hours

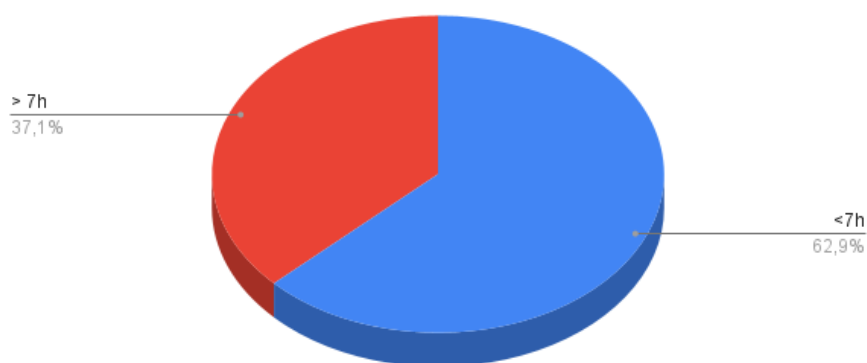
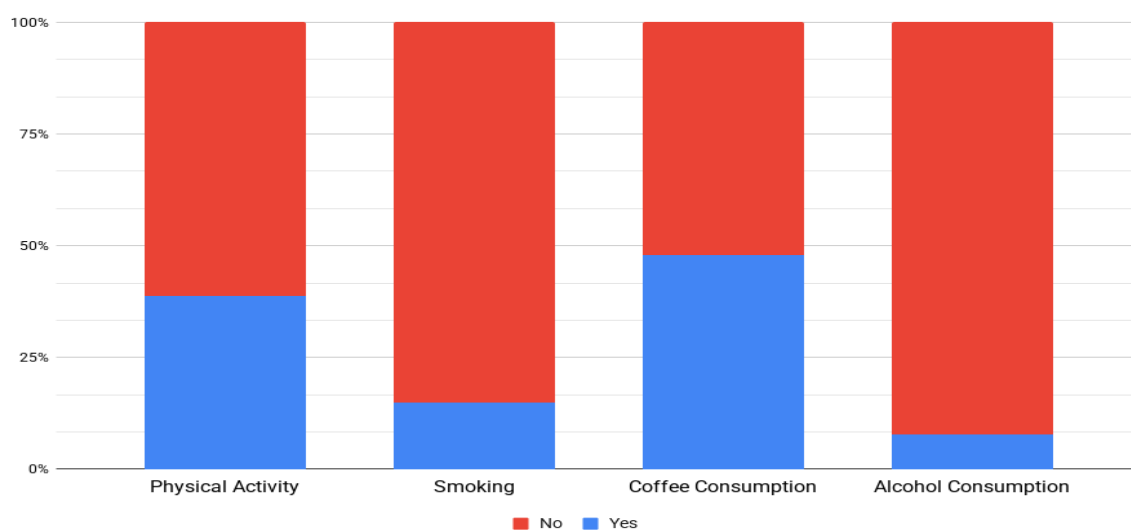


Figure 3: Physical Activity, Smoking, Coffee Consumption, and Alcohol Consumption

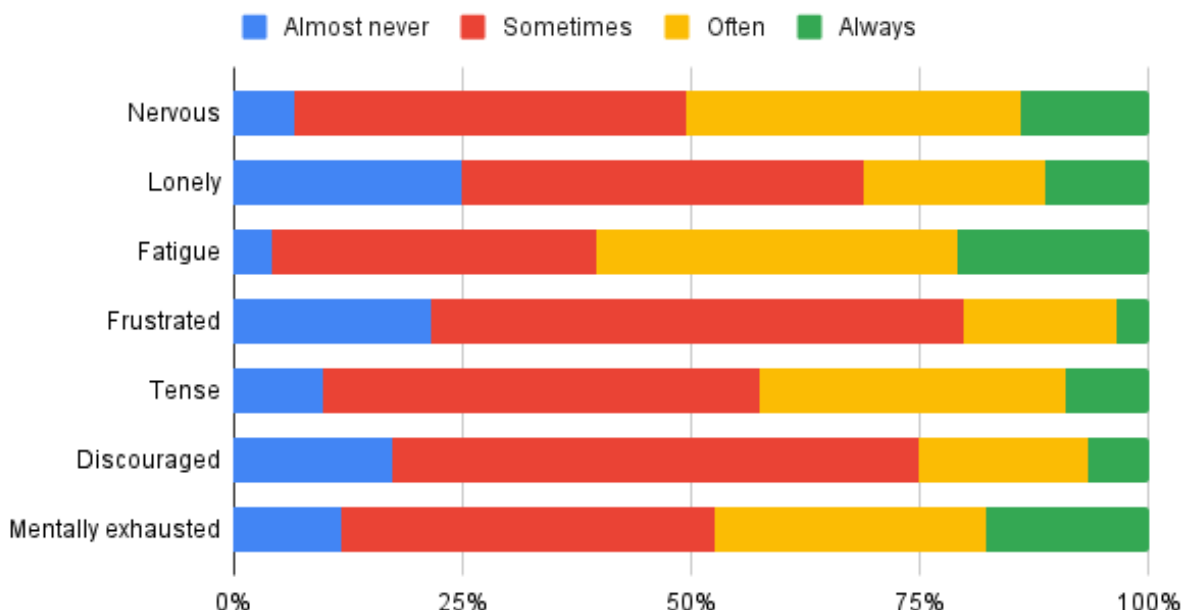
Out of 507 study participants:

- 61.1% do not engage in physical activities, while 38.9% engage in physical activities.
- Regarding smoking, 85% reported not being smokers, whereas 15% are smokers.
- 52.5% of participants indicated they do not consume coffee, while the remaining 47.5% are coffee consumers.
- Regarding the question about the percentage of participants who consume alcohol, 7.7% indicated that they are alcohol consumers, while 92.3% stated that they do not consume alcohol.



Analysis of Negative Feelings Among Study Participants

Negative feelings over the last four weeks

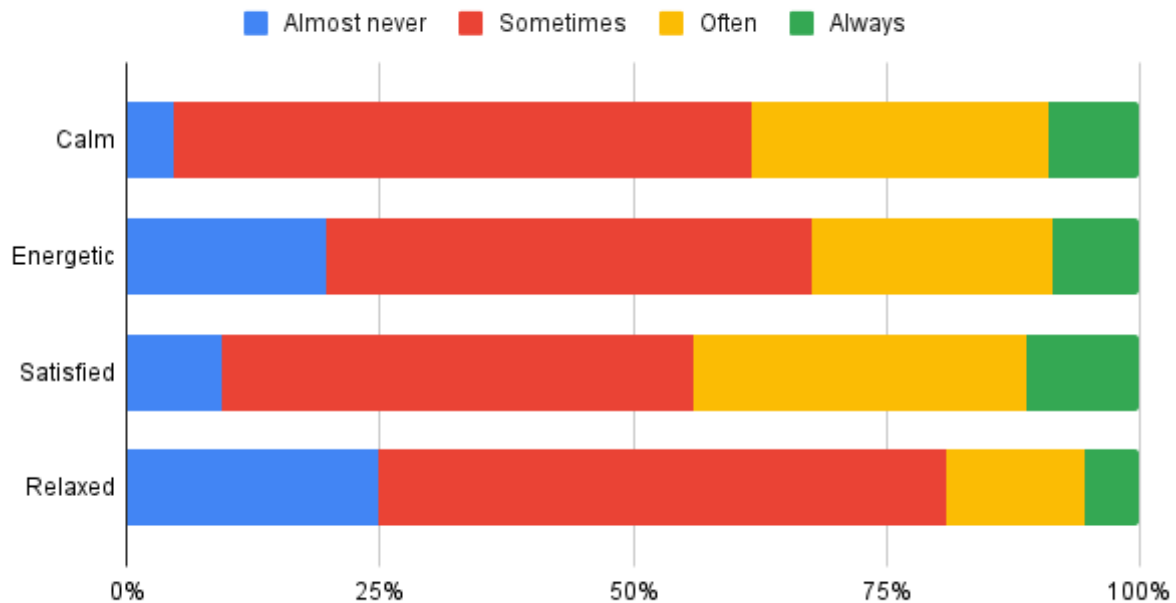


The analysis of the participants' negative feelings revealed the following:

- Regarding nervousness during the past four weeks, 6.5% of participants reported almost never feeling nervous, 43% sometimes felt nervous, 36.5% often felt nervous, and 14% always felt nervous.
- When asked about feelings of loneliness during the past four weeks, 24.9% of participants stated they almost never felt lonely, 44% sometimes felt lonely, 19.9% often felt lonely, and 11.2% indicated they always felt lonely.
- Fatigue: 4.1% of participants reported almost never feeling fatigued; 35.5% sometimes felt fatigued; 39.4% often felt fatigued; 20.9% always felt fatigued.
- Frustration: 21.5% of participants stated they almost never felt frustrated; 58.2% sometimes felt frustrated; 16.8% often felt frustrated; 3.6% always felt frustrated.
- Feeling Tense: 9.7% of participants reported almost never feeling tense; 47.7% sometimes felt tense; 33.5% often felt tense; 9.1% always felt tense.
- Feeling Discouraged: 17.4% of participants stated they almost never felt discouraged; 57.6% sometimes felt discouraged; 18.5% often felt discouraged; 6.5% always felt discouraged.
- Feeling Mentally Exhausted: 11.6% of participants reported almost never feeling mentally exhausted; 40.8% sometimes felt mentally exhausted; 29.8% often felt mentally exhausted; 17.8% always felt mentally exhausted.

Analysis of Positive Feelings Among Study Participants

Positive feelings over the last four weeks



The data analysis revealed the following insights regarding positive feelings over the past four weeks:

- Feeling Calm: 14% of participants reported almost never feeling calm; 51.5% sometimes felt calm; 26.4% often felt calm; 8.1% always felt calm.
- Feeling Energetic: 19.7% of participants reported almost never feeling energetic; 47.9% sometimes felt energetic; 23.7% often felt energetic; 8.7% always felt energetic.
- Feeling Satisfied: 9.5% of participants reported almost never feeling satisfied; 46.5% sometimes felt satisfied; 32.7% often felt satisfied; 11.2% always felt satisfied.
- Feeling Relaxed: 24.9% of participants reported almost never feeling relaxed; 56% sometimes felt relaxed; 13.6% often felt relaxed; 5.5% always felt relaxed.

Table 2

	Almost never %	Often %	Very often %	Always %
Over the past four weeks, have you felt that you have rested?	15	54.2	26.5	4.5
Over the past four weeks, have you felt that too many demands are being placed on you?	10.3	51.5	31.8	6.5
Over the past four weeks, have you had a lot of things to do?	4.1	35.1	42.2	18.5
Over the past four weeks, have you found yourself in situations of conflict?	31.8	47.5	17.2	3.6
Over the past four weeks, have you felt that you are doing things that you truly enjoy?	12.8	48.7	27.6	10.8

Over the past four weeks, have you felt afraid that you might not be able to manage or achieve your goals?	11.6	42.2	31	15.2
Over the past four weeks, have you had many decisions to make?	8.7	51.1	31	9.3
Over the past four weeks, have you felt that your problems are piling up?	11.4	45.6	28.6	14.4
Over the past four weeks, have you felt rushed?	12	45.8	31.4	10.8
Over the past four weeks, have you had many worries?	12.4	51.3	25.8	10.5
Over the past four weeks, have you been under pressure from other people?	40	38.7	16.6	4.7
Over the past four weeks, have you felt scared about the future?	11.4	40.2	28	20.3
Over the past four weeks, have you felt that you are doing things because you have to, not because you want to?	15.6	43.8	28	12.6
Over the past four weeks, have you felt criticized or judged?	25.8	48.3	19.1	6.7
Over the past four weeks, have you had difficulty relaxing?	11	46.5	30.8	11.6
Over the past four weeks, have you felt burdened with responsibilities?	9.5	46.4	29.6	14.6
Over the past four weeks, have you had enough time for yourself?	18.3	48.7	23.9	9.1
Over the past four weeks, have you felt under the pressure of deadlines?	26.2	42.6	18.7	12.4

Discussion

The analysis of the collected data highlights several key findings:

- Sleep Patterns: A significant proportion (62.9%) of participants reported sleeping less than seven hours per night.
- Physical Activity: About 61.1% of participants indicated that they do not engage in regular physical activities.
- Demands and Workload: 31.8% of participants reported often feeling that too many demands are placed on them, with 51.5% sometimes feeling the same.
- Irritability and Nervousness: 36.5% of participants often felt irritated or nervous, and 43% sometimes felt this way during the past four weeks.
- Workload: 42.2% of participants indicated having a lot of things to do, and 47.5% reported encountering conflict situations frequently.
- Fatigue: 39.4% of participants often felt tired, while 35.5% sometimes experienced fatigue.
- Frustration: 58.2% of participants reported feeling frustrated at times.

- Tension: 47.7% of participants sometimes felt tense, with 33.5% often experiencing tension.
- Worries: 25.8% of participants frequently had many worries.
- Discouragement: 57.6% of participants felt discouraged during the past four weeks.
- Fear for the Future: 28% of participants frequently felt scared about the future, and 40.2% sometimes felt this way.
- Mental Exhaustion: 40.8% of participants sometimes felt mentally exhausted, and 29.8% often felt mentally drained.

Recommendations

Based on the study data, the following recommendations are outlined:

- **Creating a healthy routine:** Establish regular schedules for daily activities such as studying, eating, sleeping, and physical activity. Maintaining this balance can help manage academic commitments while supporting personal well-being.

- **Relaxation activities:** Engage in relaxation practices like yoga, meditation, or taking short walks. These activities can help lower stress levels and improve mental health.

- **Social support and communication:** Communicate with friends, family, or professors about any concerns or emotions you may be experiencing. Seeking support from others can help alleviate stress and provide emotional relief.

- **Time management:** Implement time management strategies, such as breaking tasks into smaller, manageable parts and prioritizing them. This approach can help in reducing workload and associated stress.

- **Engaging in extracurricular activities:** Participate in non-academic activities like sports, student clubs, or cultural events. These activities can provide a much-needed balance between academic responsibilities and social engagement, helping to reduce stress.

- **Mindfulness and Cognitive Behavioral Techniques.**

Integrate mindfulness exercises and cognitive behavioral techniques to help individuals recognize and manage negative thought patterns that contribute to stress.

- **Seeking professional help:** If stress becomes overwhelming, it may be helpful to consult with mental health professionals, such as psychologists or therapists, to assist in coping with and managing stress.

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Ethical Approval: Prior to data collection, approval was obtained from the Faculty of Medical Sciences at Albanian University.

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