

AN ASSESSMENT OF PERCEIVED STRESS SOURCES AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS: EUROPEAN UNIVERSITY OF LEFKE CONTEXT

ÜNİVERSİTE ÖĞRENCİLERİNDE ALGILANAN STRES KAYNAKLARININ DEĞERLENDİRİLMESİ: LEFKE AVRUPA ÜNİVERSİTESİ

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Abstract: *The results of this study is based on the responses acquired from the undergraduate students (Architecture and Economics and Administrative Faculties) in European University of Lefke. This paper investigated stressors which are psychology, health and academic and related them to the undergraduate students in the university. In total, 210 students participated in this study. Data was collected through self-administered questionnaire that were randomly distributed and statistically tested by One-Way ANOVA and t-Test. Firstly, it was discovered that the stressors level of the Architecture students is higher than that of the Economics and Administrative Sciences Faculty students. Secondly, there is no significant result about the difference between female and male students in terms of stressors levels in university students. Thirdly, it is found that there is an important difference between stressors and nationalities of students. Lastly, we found that there is a negative relationship between stressors and academic performance. It is hoped that, these findings will help the university to provide quality services such as time management improvement sessions or might be counselling services to reduce the stress levels of the students. Also the limitation of this study was the sample size and location since our study only focused on one university. So it means that, future studies, can expand the number of universities to compare the universities and to reach general results.*

Keywords: *Perceived stress, stressors, academic performance, students*

Öz: *Bu çalışmanın sonuçları, Lefke Avrupa Üniversitesi'nde eğitim alan, lisans öğrencileri (Mimarlık ve İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakülteleri) tarafından verilen cevaplara dayanmaktadır. Yapılan bu çalışmada psikoloji, sağlık ve akademik olan stres faktörleri araştırılmış ve üniversitedeki lisans öğrencileri ile ilişkilendirilmiştir. Toplamda 210 öğrenci bu çalışmaya katılmıştır. Veriler rastgele dağıtılarak, yüz yüze uygulanan anket yoluyla toplanmış ve One-Way ANOVA ve t-Test kullanılmıştır. İlk olarak, mimarlık öğrencilerinin stres düzeylerinin İktisadi ve İdari Bilimler Fakültesi öğrencilerinden daha yüksek olduğu bulgusu elde edilmiştir. İkinci olarak, üniversite öğrencilerinin kız ve erkek öğrenciler arasındaki stres düzeyleri açısından anlamlı bir sonuç bulunamamıştır. Üçüncü olarak, stres faktörleri ve öğrencilerin uyruklarına göre anlamlı bir fark olduğu bulunmuştur. Son olarak, stres faktörleri ile akademik performans arasında negatif bir ilişki olduğu görülmüştür. Bu bulguların, üniversitenin zaman yönetimi iyileştirme seansları gibi kaliteli hizmetler sunmasına ya da öğrencilerin stres düzeylerini azaltmak için danışmanlık hizmetleri vermesine yardımcı olacağı umulmaktadır. Bu bulguların yanında çalışma bazı sınırlılıklar içermektedir. Çalışmanın sadece tek bir üniversiteye odaklanması, bu çalışmanın sınırlılığını ortaya koymaktadır. Yapılacak olan gelecek çalışmalarda, daha fazla üniversite incelenerek elde edilecek olan araştırma bulgularından karşılaştırmalı ve geneli temsil eden sonuçlar elde edilebilecektir.*

Anahtar Kelimeler: *Algılanan stres, stress kaynakları, akademik performans, öğrenciler*

INTRODUCTION

The world today, views and understands stress as a relapsing occurrence associated with professionals in various economic sectors. The effects of stress on people spread through their methods of communication, behavior, characteristics, productivity, efficiency and effectiveness. However stress doesn't apply to professional alone, this study focuses on the educational sector and in particular university students and how identified sources of stress affect their educational training and how it affects their academic performance. A lot of university students face a number of demands and balancing them could be quite burdensome.

Stress is a reaction to occurring circumstances that is perceived to modify or endanger a person's well-being and it's a rational process; the response of the body to change which involves both emotional and physical reaction (Sharma and Wavare, 2013). The term Stress both biologically and psychologically in recent years, has become a common ground or prominent colloquialism (Mannapur *et al.*, 2010). Stress can be articulated as a connection between individuals and their surrounding which is assessed as critical and classified as exceeding their ability to manage (Lazarus, 1966; Deniz & Sümer, 2010). Furthermore, stress has a definition as a physiological unspecified reaction to both internal and external demands (Selye, 1976) signifying that, stress is not caused by stressors but the emotional reaction and perception of the individual to it.

University students are frequently faced with stressful circumstances (Hirsch and Ellis, 1996), the challenges they confront may vary to that of their peers that are not students. The high strains and tension for successful grades and securing a degree after a certain period (Hirsch and Ellis, 1996). Achieving exceptional grades are not the sole stressors the students deal with, also academic stressors such as homework's, classroom conditions and examinations. Likewise, academic prerequisite such as student and faculty member relationships and academic deadline pressure could also be considered as stress sources (Sgan-Cohen and Lowental, 1988). Peers, friends and family relationships, eating and sleeping routines, loneliness could also stress and affects the average of students (Sgan-Cohen and Lowental, 1988; Wright 1967). Existing studies indicate that there is high stress levels and psychological weariness occurring among students of health care occupation (Omigbodun *et al.*, 2006). Likewise an ample number of studies have examined psychological weariness and stressors found with nursing and medical profession students (Guthrie *et al.*, 1995; Dahlin *et al.*, 2005; Sherina *et al.*, 2004; Polychronopoulou *et al.*, 2005; Rajab, 2001). Nevertheless, few studies have been carried out on perceived stress with social science and architecture students. This study examines the perceived stress sources of student from social sciences and art and design department with a consideration of different variables.

1. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK AND LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is a constriction which is followed by a demand that is perceived as either requiring (positive) or cautionary (negative) and sometimes depending on in contingency with appraisal, be it incapacitating or adaptive (Garbee *et al.*, 1980;

Field *et al.*, 2001). In the last two decades, perceived stress is one of the psychological concepts which has earned quite a share of attention (Lee *et al.*, 2013). Peoples attempt to suppress or restrict contradictory emotions, self-subjection to selected emotional thoughts related to stressful events will lead to failed stressful experience (Lumley and Provenzano, 2003; Deniz & Sümer, 2010).

Perceived stress is a paradigm explained as the relationship a person has with their environment which is evaluated as surpassing available resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). An incapacitating reaction to perceived stress is anxiety which up until date has been the only stress measurement which has been tested alongside academic performance (Field *et al.*, 200; Reeve *et al.*, 2012). Most College students consider life to be stressful (Roberti, Harrington, & Storch, 2006). Perceived stress among college and university emerges in varieties, from future uncertainties to academic performance, from challenges with interpersonal relationships to dating complications, from family issues to self-doubt (Chao, 2011). Reports have recently revealed there has been a surge in the severity of college and university student stress (Benton *et al.*, 2003). In order for students to have their perceived stress effectively managed, just as soil is essential to plants, they require a social positive support tool alongside useful coping. Clearly, most students are basically living under constant stress. However, some have developed methods to effectively manage stress better than their colleagues. When confronted by stress, they instinctively seek out for support from their friends, partners and families, and utilize it to manage and preserve their well-being (Chao, 2011).

Studies have reported academic challenges to be the most prevalent stress source among students (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987). Schafer (1996) in his studies, questioned students in a college on their most stressful daily difficulties and made a discovery that the most bothersome difficulties student face daily where frequently stressors linked with school due to consistent studying pressure, limited deadline, essay paper writing, quizzes, uninteresting instructors and plans for the future. Stress identified with academic exercises have been connected to numerous negative side effects such as depression (Aldwin & Greenberger, 1987), deficient health (Greenberg, 1981; Lesko & Summerfield, 1989) as well poor academic performance (Linn & Zeppa, 1984; Clark & Rieker, 1986). A few studies have established the existence of a relationship between poor academic performance and stress (Linn & Zeppa, 1984, Struthers et al, 2000; Clark & Rieker, 1986). In their study, Felsten and Wilcox (1992) found a significantly negative correlation between the college student stress levels and their academic performance. Also in a another study , Blumberg and Flaherty (1985) identified an opposite relationship between academic performance and self-expressed stress levels. Struthers *et al.*, (2000) similarly in their studies recorded extreme academic stress level could be linked to students having low grades. The stress levels students experienced were high as a result of levels and numerous homeworks, pressure of time, examination and grades, and uncertainty, ambiguity (Avşaroğlu, 2007). In essence, stress and its sources have a disadvantageous effect on student academic performance. Batıgün and Kayış (2014) used different stress factors to understand the level and determinants of stress factors. One of the findings of the study shows that stress level of women is significantly higher than men according to the score values.

Stressors are basically what brings about the reactions to stress is perceived as demand, threat or resource coping, checking the adequacy to manage occurring situation (Cohen, Kamarch & Mermelstein, 1983). The expectations of most university students are usually high, and this is a position of more demands and increased stress. Therefore, university students experience an environment which differs from those of their peers as they face extreme pressure and uncertainties (Shields, 2001). Students encounter possible additional stressors from dealing with disproportionate homework, unclear understanding of and miscommunication with instructor, discomfort in lecture-rooms and ambiguous homeworks (Hirsch & Ellis, 1996). Likewise, unsatisfactory and deficient family and peers relationship, irregular patterns for sleeping and eating, unhealthy behaviors and characteristics, could all also have a negative influence by enhancing student stress levels (Hudd *et al.*, 2000; Gupchup *et al.*, 2004). As a result, increase in stress level for students will supposedly provoke the use consumption and abuse of substance, hazardous health habits, smoking and alcoholism (Carpenter & Hasin, 1999; Broman, 2005). In essence, university student stressors spring from diverse sources, in this study they fall under academics (examination performance), health (Nutrition) or psychosocial (loneliness) stressors.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1. Research Sample

In this study, convenient random sampling method was implemented. This is a random based sampling because the participants answered the questionnaires during the break times of the lectures and we were chosen them randomly. We gave them 15 minutes to complete the questionnaire. The data set in this study was obtained from the students of Architecture and Economics and Administrative Sciences faculties in European University of Lefke. The universe of the research is composed of the students of these two faculties. The sample size was calculated according to the Saruhan and Özdemirci (2011). The total number of students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences is 480 and the number of students in the survey is 105. It means that 22% of the total number of students in the field were involved in the research. Also, the total number of students in the Architecture Faculty is 610 and the number of students in the survey is 105. In other words, 18% of total students in this Faculty were involved. The number of male students in survey was 114 (54.3%), the number of female students was 96 (45.3%).

2.2. Measurements

In this research, Survey was appropriated by primary data collection. The questionnaire was answered face to face by university students. The questionnaire consists of two parts. The first scale part is demographic factors such as gender, marital status, nationality and Faculty and the second part is related to stressors (Academic, Psychological and Health-related stressors). In the second part, Sreeramareddy *et al.*, (2007) measurement scale was used. The scale consisted of 23 questions and three different stress subscales created which are academic, psychological and health-related. This scale has been adopted for the university students. The Cronbach Alpha test is used to measure the reliability of multi-variable

scales and it has been used for reliability testing. The alpha value of stressors scale is 0,83 which indicates that the internal consistency is high. The questionnaire was filled through face-to-face and detailed information was provided before the answer. For each potential stressor, the frequency of occurrence was classified as never, rarely, sometimes, often and always and they are scored as 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5. So all the measures were scored on a 5 point Likert scale. SPSS 9.0 for Windows package program was used in the analysis of the data in the research. In this study we used “One-Way ANOVA” analysis, “t-Test”, “Post-hoc” and “Correlation” techniques.

2.3. Research Method and Hypothesis

In this study, we used quantitative method and descriptive research approach. The purpose of the descriptive research approach is to describe the problem at hand, the situations related to this problem, variables and the relationships between variables. We determined the independent variables as stressors; psychological, academic and health and dependent variables as gender, nationality (such as: International, Turkish and Cypriot) and Faculties. Such investigations are usually based on the relationship between two or more variables (Kurtuluş, 2004: 252). The tool that was utilized is questionnaire based. This study analyses the differences between stressors and the demographic variables such as gender, nationalities and the Faculties. This study was carried out during January-February, 2018. Each of the students was reminded about the aim and objective of the research. Also, in this survey, students felt secured about the anonymity of their answers.

The hypotheses tested in the study are listed below:

H1: There are different stress sources between two groups of students (Architecture and Economics & Administrative Science).

H2: There are different stress sources between male and female students.

H3: There are different stress sources between the nationalities of the students.

H4: All stressors are negatively correlated with Academic Performance of the students.

2.4. Analysis and Findings

Hypothesis 1: “H1: There are different stress sources between two groups of students (Architecture and Economics & Administrative Science)”. In the analysis of this hypothesis, t-Test was applied. The hypothesis is accepted as $p=.003$ ($P < 0.05$) according to the data of Table 1. The mean values in the table, the average of the students of the Faculty of Architecture (3,28) is higher than the average stress value of the students of Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (2,90). Since the higher average means high stress exposure, the stressors level of the Architecture students is higher than that of the Economics and Administrative Sciences students. It means that, there are different stressors between the faculties.

Table 1: Different Stress Sources between Faculties

	<i>Faculty of Architecture (103)</i>		<i>Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences (107)</i>		<i>p.</i>	<i>t. value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>		
Stressors	3.28	0.61	2.90	0.49	.003	4.92

p>0.05

Hypothesis 2: “H2: There are different stress sources between male and female students” hypothesis was not statistically significant according to the results of the T-Test ($p = 0,557$, $p > 0,05$), as shown in Table 2. The same findings were also found in some studies Chan, 2002: 561; Lo, 2002: 121; Woloschuk et al., 1998: 46). However, according to some researches, female students have a much higher stress level than males (Cahir & Morris, 1991: 416; Humphrey *et al.*, 2009). This result is in line with the previous researchers that, there is no definite result about the difference between female and male students in terms of stress levels in university students (Hudson & O'regan, 1994: 973).

Table 2: Difference between Stressors and Gender

	<i>Female (96)</i>		<i>Male (114)</i>		<i>p.</i>	<i>t. value</i>
	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>		
Stressors	3.11	0.44	3.07	0.68	.557	0.40

p>0,05

Hypothesis 3: “H3: There are different stress sources between the Nationalities of the students”. This hypothesis was tested by using One-Way ANOVA as the relationship between stressors of students and the Nationalities were given in table 3 data. According to the data of Table 4, only Cypriot and International background students’ results were found statistically significant (0.055, $p < 0.50$). Therefore, Hypothesis 3 is not statistically significant and it is found that there is no important difference between stressors and nationalities of students.

As a result of the analysis of variance, the possibility of F is considered to be significant and which group average differs from the others in this context. It is necessary to establish which groups the difference is between. For this purpose, in the second stage, Multiple Comparison Tests (Multiple Comparison, post-hoc tests) which is Scheffe’s test was applied. If it is necessary to test predominantly the average of one group according to the average of the other group, it is appropriate to choose Scheffe Test (Özdamar, 2002: 394).

Table 3: There are difference stress sources between the Nationalities of the students

		<i>Sum of Squares</i>	<i>df</i>	<i>Mean Square</i>	<i>F</i>	<i>Sig.</i>
Stressors	<i>Between Groups</i>	2.38	2	1.190	3.551	0.030
	<i>Within Groups</i>	69.042	206	0.335		
	Total	71.423	208			

At this point, the group averaging value according to the nationalities is mainly tested. When the average values of the groups in Table 4 are examined, Turkish Cypriot (3.53) stressor level is higher than the Turkish and International groups averages (3.20 and 3.05 respectively). High average means less exposure to stress (0.055, $p < 0.10$). However the findings are not significant in the consideration of $p < 0.05$. It means that International students have a high stress levels. This result is in line with previous findings such as Burns (1992) research mentioned that, overseas students have some difficulties such as culture shock, financial problems, problems with English language and adaptation to academic performance compare to local students.

Table 4: Scheffe Multiple Comparison Test

<i>Dependent Variable: Stress</i>	<i>Nationality (I)</i>	<i>Nationality (J)</i>	<i>Mean Difference (I-J)</i>	<i>Significance</i>	<i>Mean</i>
Stressors	<i>International</i>	<i>Turkish Cypriot</i>	-.14761 -.48011	.48011 .33250	3.05
	<i>Turkish</i>	<i>International Cypriot</i>	.14761 -.33250	.419 .316	3.20
	<i>Turkish Cypriot</i>	<i>International Turkish</i>	.48011 .33250	.055 .316	3.53

Hypothesis 4: “H4: All stressors are negatively correlated with academic performance.”

Our findings reflect that, most of the students are experiencing stressors in their daily academic activities which is consistent with the earlier findings (Cohen & Single, 2001; Ongori 2007; Ongori & Agolla, 2008) and according to the correlation analysis (Table 5), we found that only psychological stress and health stress are significantly and negatively correlated with academic performance. However, academic stress is not statistically significant with the academic performance. This corresponds with previous study that, when students are faced with high stress factors such as depression or lack of special guidance can cause to lower their academic performance (Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015).

Table 5: Correlations between Stressors and Academic Performance

	1.	2.	3.	4.
1.CGPA	—			
2.ASTRESSORS	-.072	—		
3.PSTRESSORS	-.139*	.346**	—	
4.HSTRESSORS	-.138*	.509**	.329**	—

* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level

** Correlation is significant at the 0.01 level

3. DISCUSSION AND CONCLUSION

The aim of this study was to test the research questions such as to what extent do students experience different stress based on their gender? How stressors affect academic performance of the students?, Is there any difference between stress sources and nationalities of the students? and which Faculty was affected most from the stress sources?

Starting to leave away one's family and starting a new beginning elsewhere can also lend to stress. As many students place great value on social and familial support, a change in environment can disrupt this support and it may take some time to find adequate substitutes.

Firstly, in order to be able to fight with stress, individuals must be aware of the stress sources that cause to stress for him/her. If a person has enough knowledge and can build awareness for the stress sources, it can be more manageable for them to develop their stress fighting techniques. With various techniques stress management contributes to both the physiological and psychological well-being of the individual. Also it will enable them to be responsive and harmonious to its environment.

In this study, it was found that the stress sources attempted to determine the difference between individual variables. Firstly, the study analyzed the existence of the difference in the sources of stress in the gender of students, and the results provided in the analysis denotes that the gender of students play inconsequential role in their stress sources. The results of the gender comparison is complementary to some existing studies (Chan, 2002: 561; Lo, 2002: 121; Woloschuk *et al.*, 1998: 46).

Secondly, the two academic Faculties, Architecture and Economics and Administrative Sciences after being analyzed has revealed a significant difference in their stressor sources. It appears that an average student in the architecture department is exposed to more stressors that an average economic and administrative sciences student. Architecture students have higher volumes of

classwork and homework within limited timeframe than students from economic and administrative sciences.

The third significant point is the relationship between the stressor sources and student academic performance. Similar to previous studies like Struthers et al (2000) and Felsten and Wilcox (1992), this study reveals that the amount of stressors of university students is adversely related to the academic performance of student. Students will have to effectively manage their stress in order to have successful academic performance.

The fourth point of observation in this study is to what extent the nationality of student is affected by their stress level. International student being far away from home encounter a higher number psychosocial stressors and other stressors in general. Turkish student face less stress level due to similarity in the local culture, food, language and proximity with their families and also the Cypriot stressor are barely significant being indigenous of the location (Sahin, 2014; Yucel & Koydemir, 2015).

4. MANAGERIAL IMPLICATIONS

The university should always hire more qualified teaching staff to ease the staffing of crowded conference rooms. As many academicians encourage students to take advantage of internet resources to conduct their research/assignments, it is important for researching students to have sufficient computer stations to prevent unsuccessful submission in their assignments. Also, the university should also provide and suggest services in time management in order to help students perfectly manage their time for their assignments and social activities. This will also help them to create effective academic life and family/social balance. Organizing their time effectively can decrease the academic stress (Misra and McKean, 2000). When the students find any lessons difficult to pass or to study, they should be encouraged by university to get assistance and help and use the career counselling services. In addition, for both students and lecturers, University should provide an access to the stress reduction sessions as needed. Lecturers also should be encouraged by university to offer advice to the students when they are under stressful situations.

5. LIMITATIONS

This study has several limitations. The sample of the study was too small since only students who were taking business and architecture related courses were sampled for the study. Lack of generalization of our results to other departments in Northern Cyprus is an important limitation of this study. Cross-sectional design of our study is another limitation since associations presented lack temporality. Specifically future studies can be carried out using longitudinal method to find out how students experience stress, effect and adapted coping methods at the university.

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