

STUDIES ON PSYCHOLOGICAL STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES

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Abstract:

Stress in the form of psychological stress has become a familiar phenomenon of the contemporary society where it affects persons of various ages, occupation, and social statuses. Academic demands, career and societal pressures are some of the contributing factors to mental stress and emotional imbalance. The given study is designed to investigate the degree of psychological strain that people may face and to study the coping mechanisms that can help people cope with it successfully. The study uses a descriptive research design, primary and secondary data. A structured questionnaire with a Likert scale was used to gather primary data of 100 respondents which included students and working professionals. Research articles, books and scholarly journals on psychological stress and coping mechanisms provided secondary data. The data collected were interpreted using statistical tools like the percentage analysis, reliability analysis and the one sample t-test. A reliability test revealed that the Cronbach's Alpha value was 0.898, which suggests that the measurement scale has high internal consistency. It was found out that the most common reasons why respondents were stressed were the experience of unexpected events, growing responsibilities, and the feeling of being out of control in matters that are important in life. Nevertheless, other coping strategies like problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping were identified as effective in dealing with stress. The paper emphasizes the need to have the right coping mechanisms in place to sustain a good psychological state and emotional stability.

Keywords: Psychological Stress, Coping Strategies, Stress Management, Emotional Regulation, Problem-Focused Coping, Mental Well-being.

1. Introduction

Psychological stress has come out as one of the greatest issues that have been affecting people in modern society. The accelerated social, technological and economic developments have exacerbated the pressure exerted on individuals both in school and at work. Stress is widely perceived as psychological and physiological reaction taking place when people feel that the demands of the environment surpass their ability to effectively cope with them (Cohen et al., 1983; Schneiderman et al., 2005). Chronic stress may have a variety of negative effects, such as anxiety, depressive symptoms, decreased productivity, and worsening of physical health and well-being (Schneiderman et al., 2005; Ganster and Rosen, 2013). Consequently, the nature of psychological stress and how individuals react to them has been of great interest in research studies in psychology and behavioral sciences.

In educational and workplace environments, stress has been linked to a variety of factors, which are closely interconnected, such as academic stress, exams, deadlines, work overload, role conflict, job insecurity, and work-life balance problems (Ganster and Rosen, 2013; Labrague et al., 2017). Academic competition, performance pressure, and uncertainty about future career are common causes of stress among students, but the stress of professionals working in organizations, time pressure, and overload are common among professionals (Ganster and Rosen, 2013; Labrague et al., 2017). When people find themselves in stressful situations they use various coping mechanisms to deal with the situation that they are being pressured with. The process of managing both the internal and external demands that are

perceived to be stressful through cognitive and behavioral efforts is known as coping (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004).

The coping strategies are generally categorized into three broad coping styles, problem-focused coping, emotion-focused coping, and avoidance coping (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Carver et al., 1989). Problem-oriented coping is based on directly solving the cause of stress by planning, problem solving, and information seeking and emotion-oriented coping is based on trying to control emotional responses by methods like positive reinterpretation, relaxation, and social support (Folkman and Lazarus, 1980; Carver et al., 1989). Conversely, avoidance coping involves withdrawal, denial and procrastination; though these techniques may help in temporarily alleviating distress, they have been linked to worse psychological outcomes in the long term, such as depressive symptoms (Holahan et al., 2005). Thus, the study of the interplay between stressors and coping strategies can help to enhance the psychological well-being. The management of stress is a significant aspect that should be studied and treated as a means of enhancing resilience and emotional stability as well as the quality of life (Folkman and Moskowitz, 2004; Amanvermez et al., 2023).

2. Literature Review

The psychological stress and coping style has been extensively researched among diverse groups of people, especially students and workers. In a literature review of the article by Labrague et al. (2017), stress and coping mechanisms of nursing students were studied, and the authors found that academic load, clinical duties, and performance expectations were the leading factors in stress levels. The researchers highlighted that coping strategies commonly used by students in order to cope with stress are problem-solving coping, emotional regulation coping, and social support coping. On a similar note, Misra and McKean (2000) explored academic stress among college students and emphasized that assignments, exams and due dates are some of the significant stressors that affect anxiety and psychological health. They also found that stress levels are heightened by poor time management and that leisure activities and social interactions can be effective in reducing stress levels. In addition, Sintaan and Rashid (2021) investigated the perceptions of stress among the students of healthcare and found out that the perception of clinical exposure, examination anxiety, and the entry into the professional practice is a significant source of psychological stress. The authors theorized that with time, the students would acquire more effective coping mechanisms such as peer talks and mindfulness. All these studies provide evidence that the academic environment tends to subject the students to significant amounts of psychological stress, and the necessity to develop effective coping strategies and institutional support networks to enhance mental health.

Stress at work has also been widely studied among the professionals and academic faculty. Shen and Slater (2020) used an integrative review, which aims to investigate occupational stress and coping strategies in university academic staff. They found out that a high teaching load, research demands, and job insecurity were the key stressors to academic professionals. The authors also described strategies like time management, peer support, and cognitive reframing as coping strategies that are significant in sustaining psychological well-being. Chao (2011) also investigated stress management techniques in the adults and highlighted the significance of social support systems in alleviating stress. The study has indicated that with the help of family members and peers involved, individuals are in a better position to deal with emotional challenges and maintain mental stability. The study also revealed that problem-oriented coping styles are more effective in dealing with stress related problems than avoidance coping styles. In addition, Park and Adler (2003) explored coping styles in medical students and discovered that active problem-solving coping methods are more effective to mitigate anxiety and psychological distress and avoidance-based coping frequently results in increased stress. These results indicate that

coping mechanisms are important elements that affect the capacity of people to cope with work-related stress and achieve good health.

A number of theoretical and empirical research has also been used to elaborate the connection between stress, coping skills and mental wellbeing. The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Folkman and Lazarus (1985) is used to explain that stress arises when a person feels that there is an imbalance between the demands of the environment and the resources that they have to manage those demands. They claim that people constantly assess stressful events using cognitive appraisal, and adjust the responses to them. Lazarus (1993) also extended this idea by noting that coping mechanisms may be put under problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping, where problem-focused coping seeks to deal with the problem that has caused the stress and emotional-focused coping that manages the expression of emotions about the problem. Moreover, Ahmadi et al. (2023) also investigated the psychological stress experienced by older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic and discovered that social isolation, fear of contracting the virus, and disturbance of daily life had a considerable impact on mental health. Their results indicated that coping mechanisms like the presence of social network, religious faith and positive cognitive reframing were some of the ways people could cope with stress. Likewise, Fawzy et al. (1993) also studied coping strategies in patients with malignant melanoma and reported that psychological therapies and proactive coping techniques had a positive effect on emotional well-being and health outcomes. Taken together, these studies outline the relevance of proper coping mechanisms in the alleviation of psychological stress and enhancement of the overall mental state.

3. Research Methodology

Research Design

The current research is based on a descriptive research design to identify the degree of psychological stress and the coping mechanisms embraced by people to deal with stress. Descriptive research is useful in the systematic description of the features of a population and the relationships between variables in connection with psychological stress and coping mechanisms.

Data Sources

The research uses both primary and secondary data. Primary data were gathered using respondent questionnaire, structured questionnaire and secondary data were gathered using published research articles, journals, books and reliable academic databases on psychological stress and coping strategies.

Population and Sample Size

The study target population will include students and working professionals with various academic and professional background. The study had a sample size of 100 respondents. The respondents are representative of people who constantly experience stress at school or at work.

Sampling Technique

The respondents were selected by using a simple random sampling technique. This will make sure that all members of the target population had an equal opportunity to become part of the study and this will minimize sampling bias and enhance the accuracy of the findings.

Data Collection Instrument

A structured questionnaire was taken to gather the data using a five-point Likert scale (Never; Very Often). The questionnaire was 10 items which were based on psychological stress and coping

mechanisms. The questions would be used to gauge the perception of the respondents on the level of stress, emotional response, and coping behaviors.

Reliability of the Instrument

A Cronbachs Alpha test was performed to make sure that the questionnaire is reliable. The measure of reliability should be 0.898 that implies a high degree of internal consistency between the items used in the study.

Data Analysis Techniques

Statistical tools and techniques were used to analyze the data collected. To learn about the level of stress of respondents, descriptive statistics like frequency distribution, percentage analysis, and mean values were applied. Moreover, one-sample t-test was used to test the statistical significance of the stress variables. Tables and graphical representation were used to present the results in a better way.

4. Results & Discussion

The outcomes show that the respondents were at moderate to high levels of psychological stress, especially associated with unforeseen factors and growing responsibility. There were significant stress indicators through statistical analysis. Nevertheless, problem coping and emotion coping strategies enabled individuals to cope with stress effectively whereas avoidance coping strategies were linked to increased stress levels.

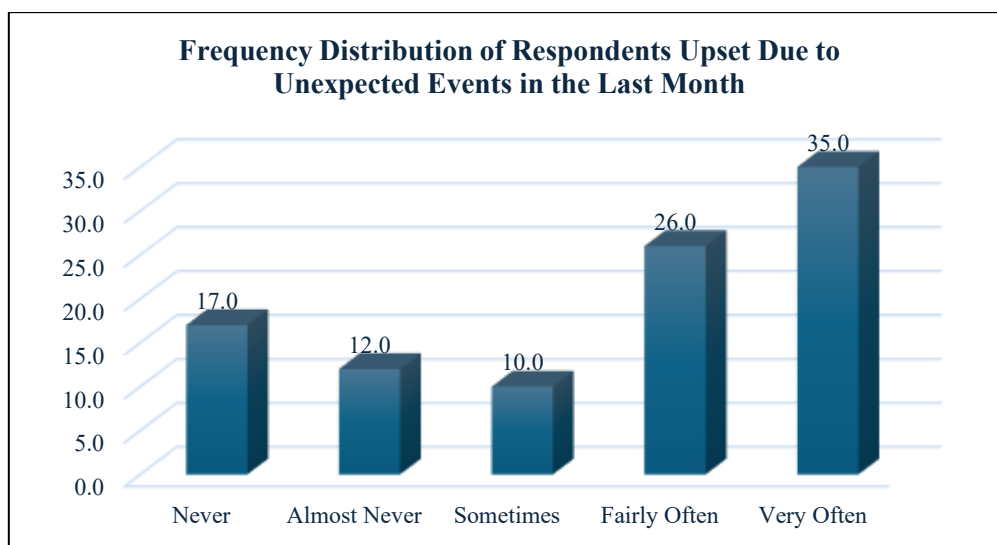


Figure 1: Frequency Distribution of Respondents Upset Due to Unexpected Events in the Last Month

The table demonstrates the frequency distribution of the respondents, who became upset because of unexpected events in the past month. The findings show that 35% of participants have felt very frequently upset and 26% often upset, which implies that a significant percentage of the population regularly suffer emotional turmoil caused by unexpected circumstances. In the meantime, 10 percent claimed occasionally to be upset and 12 percent claimed that it hardly ever happened. As well, 17% of the respondents said they had never felt like that. On the whole, the results obtained have shown that over fifty percent of the participants experience stress due to some unexpected situations rather often, which underlines the importance of sudden life events as a factor in the development of psychological stress.

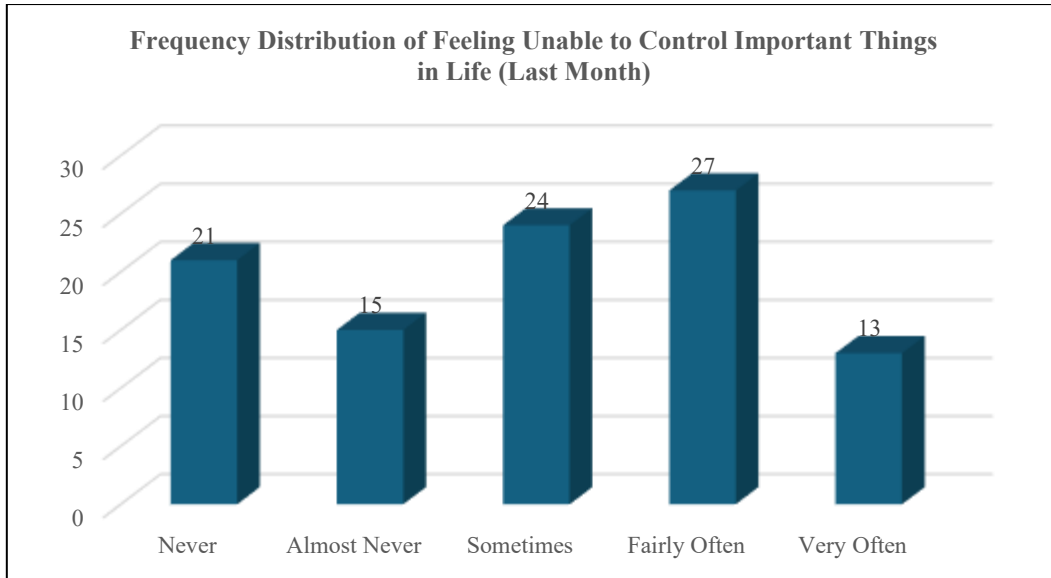


Figure 2: Frequency Distribution of Feeling Unable to Control Important Things in Life (Last Month)

The frequency table shows the distribution of the frequency of respondents who experienced a sense of being unable to control key aspects of their lives in the past month. The results indicate that one quarter of the participants mentioned experiencing a lack of control quite frequently (27%), and 13% said they very frequently experienced it, which indicates that a large percentage of the population is not able to control the important aspects of their lives. In the meantime, 24% of participants claimed that they occasionally felt so, which suggests moderate perceived stress levels. Conversely, 21% of them have never had such feelings, and 15% of them have had almost never. In general, the findings indicate that a considerable number of respondents have difficulties in controlling critical life circumstances.

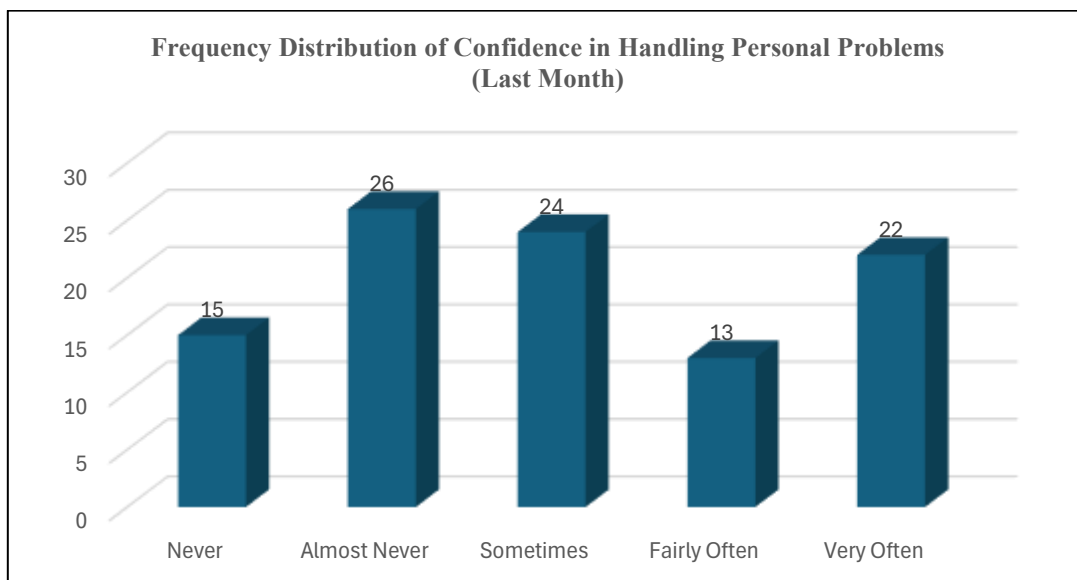


Figure 3: Frequency Distribution of Confidence in Handling Personal Problems (Last Month)

The figure shows the frequency distribution of the confidence of the respondents about their ability to cope with their personal problems over the past month. The findings indicate that one-fourth of the respondents (26) almost never felt confident, and 15% of them never felt confident, which indicates that a significant proportion of people is not confident in their ability to cope with personal issues. In the meantime, 24% of the respondents also said that they sometimes felt confident, which means that they

have a median degree of coping skills. A lower percentage, 13% indicated that they felt confident quite often and 22% said that they felt very often that they could deal with their problems. On the whole, the results suggest that there are mixed confidence levels among the respondents with a good number being uncertain on how to handle personal challenges.

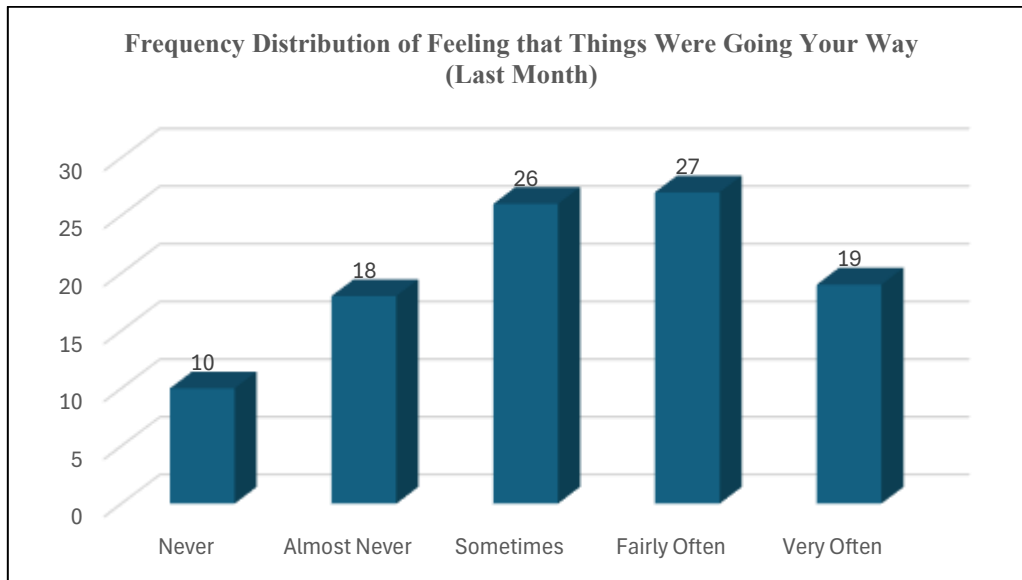


Figure 4: Frequency Distribution of Feeling that Things Were Going Your Way (Last Month)

The table displays the frequency of those respondents who believed that things were going their way in the past month. The findings show that 27% of participants had fairly frequent positive experiences and 19% of participants claimed that they very frequently felt that things were going their way, showing relatively optimistic attitudes of certain people. In the meantime, 26% said that they sometimes feel that way, which means that they are moderately satisfied with life situations. In contrast, 18% of the respondents reported almost never, and 10% of the respondents reported never feeling that things were going their way. On the whole, the results indicate that there is a mixed experience amongst the respondents with some reporting positive experiences and the others reporting difficulties.

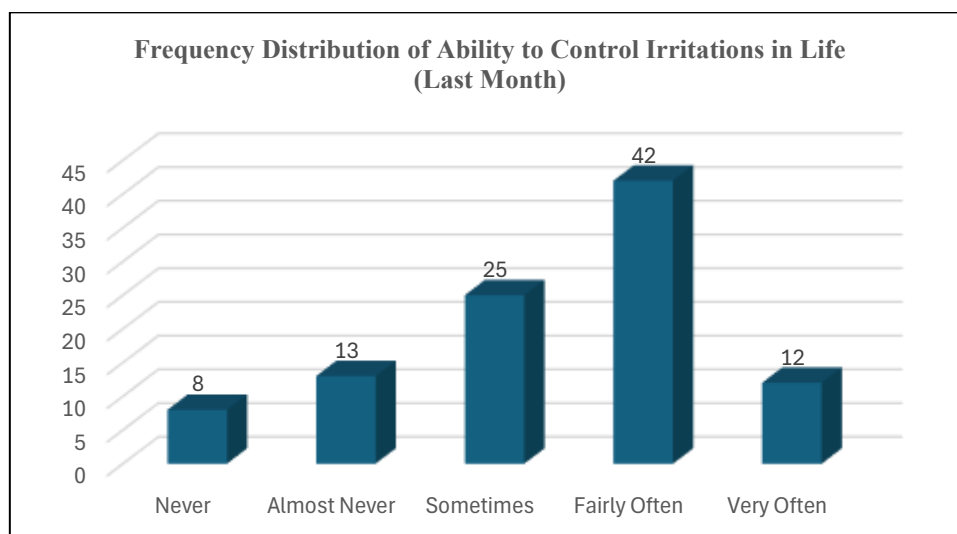


Figure 5: Frequency Distribution of Ability to Control Irritations in Life (Last Month)

The figure shows the frequency distribution of the respondents who were able to control irritations in their lives within the past month. The results indicate that 42 percent of the participants reported that they can often manage irritations, so the proportion of people who have moderate emotional control is considerable. Also, 12 percent said that they could effectively control irritations very often which is a good indication of a high coping skill among some respondents. On the other hand, a quarter claimed to occasionally cope with irritations, which implies that they were successful at times in regulating emotional responses. Conversely, 13% of those who responded almost never and 8% of those who responded never could control irritations. In general, the findings imply that the majority of the respondents show a fair capacity to handle irritations in their everyday life.

Case Processing Summary			
		N	%
Cases	Valid	100	100.0
	Excluded ^a	0	.0
	Total	100	100.0
a. Listwise deletion based on all variables in the procedure.			

The case processing summary indicates that all 100 responses (100%) were valid and included in the analysis, while no cases were excluded. This confirms that the dataset is complete and reliable, ensuring accurate statistical analysis and meaningful interpretation of the research findings.

Reliability Statistics	
Cronbach's Alpha	N of Items
.898	10

The reliability analysis shows a Cronbach’s Alpha value of 0.898 for 10 items, indicating a high level of internal consistency among the variables used in the questionnaire. This suggests that the measurement scale is reliable and the items effectively measure psychological stress and coping strategies in the study.

One-Sample Statistics				
	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Std. Error Mean
In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	100	3.50	1.494	.149
In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	100	2.96	1.340	.134
In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and “stressed”	100	3.14	1.385	.139
In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	100	3.62	1.153	.115
In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	100	3.44	1.067	.107

In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	100	3.58	1.249	.125
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The one-sample statistics show that, in the past month, respondents have moderate to high levels of psychological stress. The largest mean score was in difficulty coping with responsibilities (Mean = 3.62, SD = 1.153), then difficulty feeling that things were getting out of control (Mean = 3.58, SD = 1.249), and difficulty being upset over something unexpected happening (Mean = 3.50, SD = 1.494). Other cases of anger were as a result of uncontrollable situations (Mean = 3.44, SD = 1.067) and experiencing nervous or stressed (Mean = 3.14, SD = 1.385). Feeling that one is unable to control important things in life had the lowest mean score (Mean = 2.96, SD = 1.340). In general, the findings indicate that a large number of participants often face stressful circumstances connected with their duties, unpredicted events, and perceived powerlessness in their everyday lives.

One-Sample Test						
	Test Value = 0					
	t	df	Sig. (2-tailed)	Mean Difference	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	
					Lower	Upper
In the last month, how often have you been upset because of something that happened unexpectedly?	23.426	99	.000	3.500	3.20	3.80
In the last month, how often have you felt that you were unable to control the important things in your life?	22.085	99	.000	2.960	2.69	3.23
In the last month, how often have you felt nervous and "stressed"?	22.663	99	.000	3.140	2.87	3.41
In the last month, how often have you found that you could not cope with all the things that you had to do?	31.403	99	.000	3.620	3.39	3.85
In the last month, how often have you been angered because of things that were outside of your control?	32.250	99	.000	3.440	3.23	3.65

In the last month, how often have you felt difficulties were piling up so high that you could not overcome them?	28.670	99	.000	3.580	3.33	3.83
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The results of one-sample t-test show that all variables of psychological stress are significant statistically, because the p-value (Sig.) is not zero. 2-tailed) for all items is 0.000, which is less than 0.05. This indicates that there was a significant occurrence of stress related situations in the past month by the respondents. The greatest difference in means was found on the difficulty coping with responsibilities (Mean = 3.620, t = 31.403), and then feeling difficulties piling up (Mean = 3.580, t = 28.670) and being upset by the unexpected events (Mean = 3.500, t = 23.426). All the variables have positive 95% confidence intervals, which mean that there is a consistent pattern of stress between the respondents. Altogether, the findings help to prove that respondents often face psychological stress connected with the feeling of lack of control, unforeseen circumstances, and excessive amounts of tasks.

Discussion

The study results suggest that the psychological stress is commonly felt by people both in academic and professional settings. The statistical outcomes indicate that the respondents often face stressful circumstances associated with unpredictable events, a greater number of obligations, and inability to cope with various tasks. To illustrate, a considerable percentage of respondents claimed to be upset because of unexpected events and had problems coping with responsibilities. The average scores of the one-sample statistics also reflect moderate to high stress levels of the participants. The findings are congruent with other research studies that have found academic pressure, work overload, and time management issues as key contributors to psychological stress. The reliability test has resulted in Cronbachs Alpha of 0.898 which shows high internal consistency of the questionnaire that was being used in the study. This establishes that the measurement scale is appropriate in measuring psychological stress and coping behavior among respondents. Moreover, the results of the one-sample t-test revealed statistically significant results ($p < 0.05$), that the levels of stress in the respondents are not based on random variance. Another significant aspect of the study is the significance of coping strategies in dealing with stress. The most common problem-oriented coping strategies included planning, seeking information, and time management and were used extensively by respondents. Emotion-oriented interventions such as social support, relaxation were also found to help lower the stress levels. Nonetheless, coping strategies like procrastination were linked to increased stress levels, implying that they are not very effective in managing stress in the long run.

Conclusion

The conclusion made in the current study is that psychological stress is an inevitable element of the contemporary life, especially among students and working people. The swift dynamics in educational requirements, employment, and social circles have escalated the extent of psychological strain among people. The results of the study show that a significant number of respondents often feel stressed because of the unforeseen events, inability to control the key aspects of life, and the inability to cope with the tasks. These stressors may have an adverse effect on emotional well-being, productivity, and quality of life. The research also highlights the importance of the coping mechanisms in the effective management of psychological stress. The findings indicate that those who embrace problem-oriented coping mechanisms, which include planning, solving problems, and management of time, can cope with

stressful events. Likewise, emotion-based coping mechanism, such as relaxation methods, social support, and positive thinking, enable individuals to control their emotional reactions and to keep psychological equilibrium. Conversely, avoidance coping behaviors are likely to add to the stress and can cause chronic psychological problems. On the whole, the research indicates that there is a need to raise awareness and training in regards to handling stress. Schools and other organizations ought to encourage mental health programs, counseling sessions and stress management workshops in order to help people acquire effective coping mechanisms. These programs can go a long way in enhancing psychological health, resilience, and life satisfaction.

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Declaration

We hereby declare that this research paper titled "Studies on Psychological Stress and Coping Strategies" was prepared and carried out by us and that all the sources for information in this research paper were duly acknowledged. The research paper has not been initially or otherwise submitted to any University or journal for publication.

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