The Impact of Stress on Academic Performance Among CCNY Undergraduate Students

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Abstract

This study examines the impact of stress on the stress levels and academic performance of City College (CCNY) undergraduate students. The study involved a 6-point Likert scale survey investigating the effect of stress on academic performance and willingness to seek academic help. Results from the study revealed that over 80% of the students experienced high levels of stress and did not seek help from professors despite being under extreme academic stress and competition. Findings from the study reveal the lack of support available for students experiencing academic pressure and stress. The results of the study signify the immediate need for change on an institutional level to promote healthier academic practices that aid in the mental health and well-being of students. Better academic and emotional strategies must be created to promote better mental health of students.

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Introduction

In a fast-paced world, students are running out of time as deadlines are approaching and assignments are due. College students are facing extreme academic pressure, leading to high levels of stress resulting in low academic performance. Due to the complexity of tasks and challenging coursework, juggling societal expectations along with jobs, and excelling academically has become a challenge. Chronic stress contributes to anxiety, lack of focus, depression, and distress. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, Increased coursework has become normalized due to tough grading systems. The introduction of AI has resulted in academic coursework becoming even more challenging. Professors have become very diligent with grading and sometimes are very critical of the work students produce. Students use AI platforms to help with coursework at the same time, students must ensure their work meets expectations that meet the grading standards. Competition among various majors, especially STEM majors and medical-related fields, has increased. Students are constantly struggling to stay on track. Over the recent years, high levels of stress and academic pressure have become normalized in academic culture. Professors expect students to complete a lot of assignments, often overlooking other responsibilities and obligations students have. Students who belong to computer science programs struggle even more due to complex tasks assigned, such as coding. Students are expected to perform well despite other struggles they are facing. The City College of New York (CCNY) is a well-known urban public university serving a diverse student population from all over New York. Most of the student population attending (CCNY) are commuter students commuting from different parts of the city and have obligations outside of school, which contributes to the pre-existing levels of stress from academics alone. Stress has significant effects on physical and mental well-being. The human brain is a complex system, and stress psychologically and neurologically impacts the nervous system, which contributes to poor sleep schedules, lack of motivation, difficulty concentrating, and lack of focus. It can cause long-term health problems such as depression and anxiety. Stress negatively affects the students, resulting in demotivation, distraction, distress, and poor academic performance. This study aims to explore the connection between stress and academic performance among undergraduate (CCNY) students. It will use a survey to examine how stress impacts

students' connection to academic performance. The results will be compared to existing research and literature aiming to promote better academic practices and devise effective stress management techniques to help students cope with high levels of stress to improve academic performance.

Literature Review

Previous research studies have reported the effects of irregular sleeping patterns. Huang et al (2024) investigated the effect sleep had on mental health and academic performance. The research revealed that sleeplessness results in a decreased ability to concentrate, which therefore contributes to higher levels of depression, negatively impacting academic performance. Sleep serves as a crucial factor in evaluating perceived stress levels because sleep is directly linked to the emotional and physical responses of the human body. The study highlighted that irregular sleeping patterns often resulted from academic pressure, which led to poor academic performance. The study showed that stress is not just an emotional factor and impacts mental stability and the ability to retain focus. In addition, Steare et al. (2023) stated academic stress as one of the leading factors that lead to mental health problems among college students. To cope with academic stress, Chen (2024) states that resilience can help manage stress and improve mental health. A study by Castillo-Navarrete et al (2024) investigated the issue through a biological perspective to examine the connection between stress and cortisol levels. The study measured cortisol levels to mimic the levels of stress experienced by the students. The study revealed a link between cortisol and stress, expressing that high levels of cortisol were directly proportional to the student's academic performance. The study examined cortisol levels specifically during the examination period and found that students with high cortisol levels reported lower academic outcomes. This research study showed that stress negatively impacts the students' mental cognition and physical well-being. This study signifies that extreme levels of stress negatively impact the student's cognitive functioning and, therefore, academic performance. Mirabelli et al. (2025) presented that increased stress levels were normalized in STEM-related fields, specifically engineering programs. The study revealed that students belonging to STEM-related fields experienced higher academic pressure, which resulted in higher levels of stress compared to other fields. Mirabelli et al. (2025) highlighted that students from STEM-related fields are

not provided with or equipped with the appropriate support needed. The study revealed how academic pressure results in higher stress levels decreasing students' ability to retain focus and perform well academically. Furthermore, Atif et al. (2025) discussed the coping strategies used by Pakistani dental students to manage stress levels resulting from challenging academic workloads. The research Expressed that females and final year students specifically experienced higher stress levels compared to others because of cultural stigma attached with seeking help from professors. This study provided insights to understanding differences that exist in the level of stress experience between students and the importance of gender and culture while examining stress levels amongst student students.Conjunctively, these research studies discussed and addressed the negative impacts of stress on mental health and academic outcomes from a psychological and neurological perspective. They highlight the levels of stress and how they differ across different academic fields. On the contrary, there is not enough research present to examine the effects of stress on commuter students' academic performance. More research is required to examine how stress impacts the academic outcomes of City College (CCNY) students.

Methodology

This research study followed a quantitative design to analyze the connection between stress and academic performance of the Undergraduate City College of New York (CCNY) students. This Survey was administered to 30 undergraduate (CCNY) students online through google forms. Students were randomly selected. The sample consisted of students from different academic backgrounds and majors.

The survey consisted of 6, 5-point Likert scale multiple choice questions to identify how often students experienced stress, lack of attention, focus and decreased willingness to seek help from professors. In addition, the survey also questioned participants to report if they considered academic pressure as a contributor to stress levels. The participants were informed about the anonymity of the survey to ensure the validity and reliability of the results. The study respected the participants' privacy to maintain integrity, adhering to ethical research standards. The responses were analyzed by computing percentages and presented in pie charts. After the responses were collected, the data was evaluated by measuring the response percentage for each question and presented in the form of pie charts. This design

presented a straightforward connection between stress experienced by undergraduate (CCNY) students and their academic performance.

Results

        The results from the survey showed that 83% of the undergraduate students of City College Of New York (CCNY) felt stressed either " often" or "sometimes" during the semester, and 46.7% of the students reported difficulty with retaining concentration. 13.3% of students claimed to indulge in procrastination while 36.7% of students struggled with maintaining focus. 53.3% of the students delayed submission of assignments. Furthermore, in terms of academic assistance, only 16.7% of the students sought help from professors. 83.3% of students faced academic pressure which significantly increased their stress levels. Moreover, 53.4% of students claimed that they were rarely or never willing to seek help. The findings from the survey revealed a strong connection between lack of focus, procrastination, and academic pressure faced by CCNY undergraduate students.
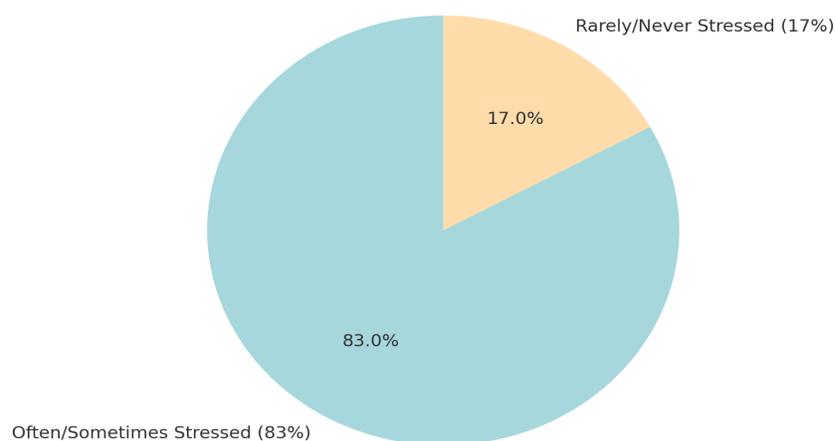
Figure 1. Student Stress Frequency

Rarely/Never Stressed (17%)

17.0%

83.0%

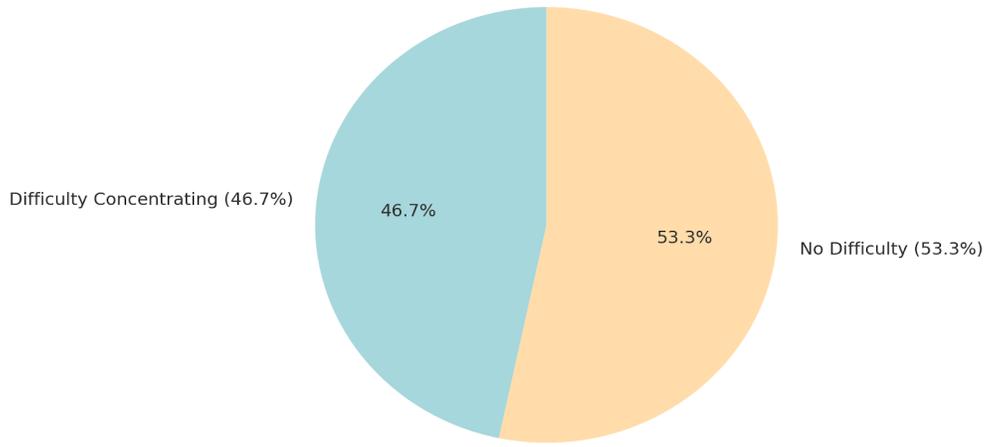Often/Sometimes Stressed (83%)

Figure 2. Difficulty Concentrating Due to Stress

Difficulty Concentrating (46.7%)   46.7%   53.3%   No Difficulty (53.3%)

Figure 3. Procrastination and Focus Issues

Procrastination (13.3%)   13.3%   50.0%   Neither (50%)

Struggled with Focus (36.7%)   36.7%
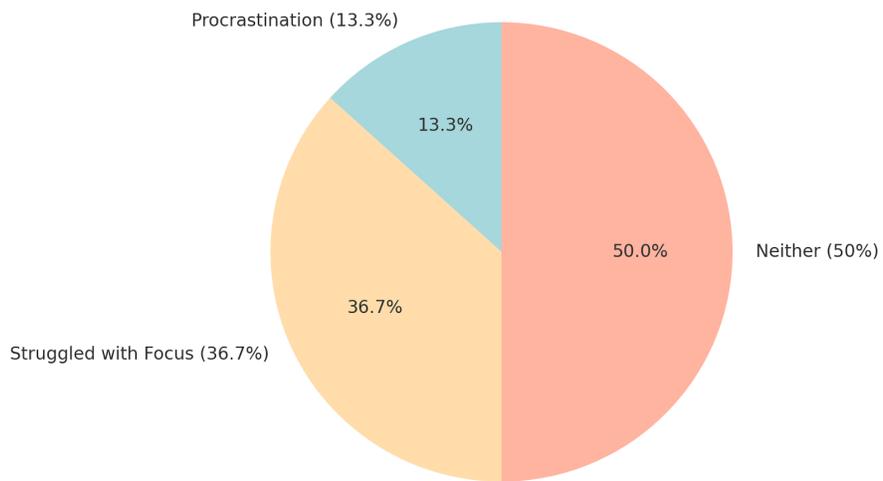
Figure 4. Assignment Submission Delays

Delayed Assignments (53.3%)   53.3%   46.7%   Submitted On Time (46.7%)
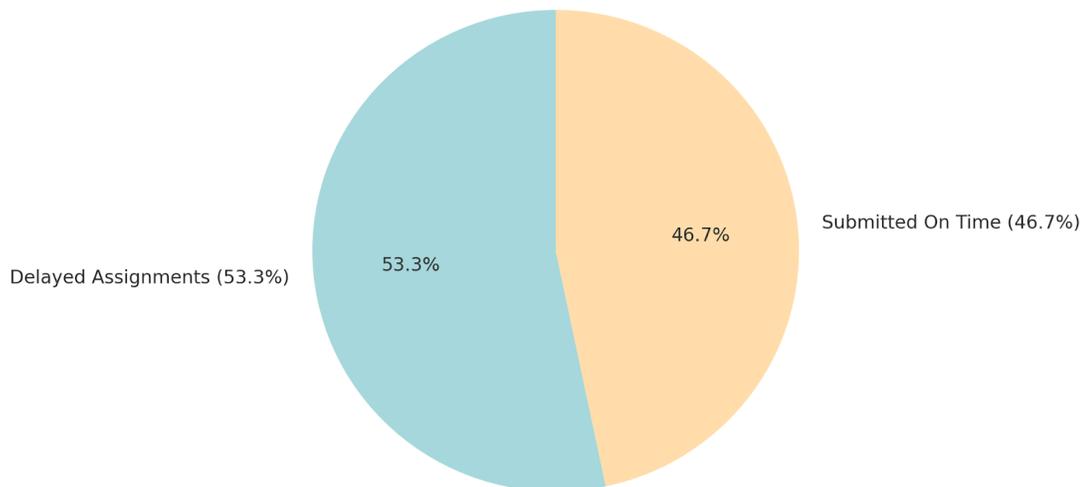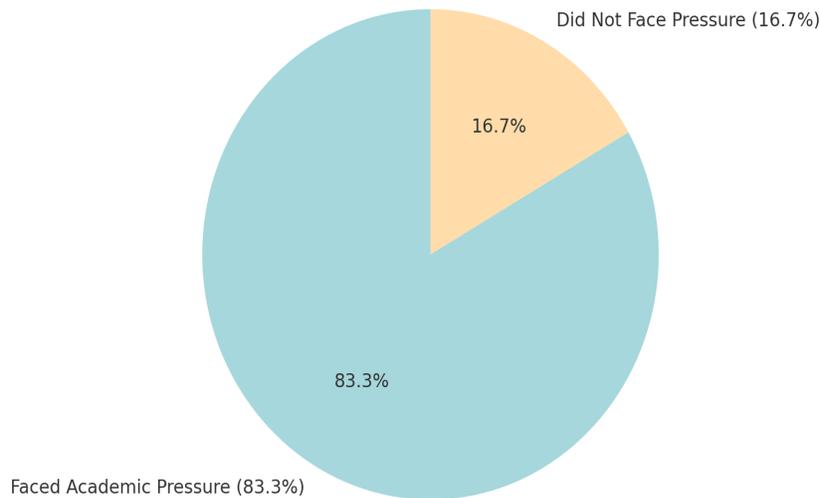
Figure 6. Students Facing Academic Pressure

Discussion

The results show that most CCNY undergraduate students find stress to be a crucial element impacting their academic performance and mental health. The findings from the survey indicate that the 83% of the students reported that they struggled to remain focused and maintain concentration. Furthermore, majority of the students were reluctant to seek help from professors which resulted in procrastination. Most students claimed that they often felt stressed throughout the semester. The results from this study effectively connect with Huang et al. (2024) and Mirabelli et al. (2025) highlighting stress results in lower concentration levels which negatively impacts academic outcomes. It demonstrated that stress negatively impacts mental health and leads to further health implications which aligns with Steare et al. (2023).

Most of the students claim that they rarely asked for help from professors which relates to the research by Atif et al (2025), reflecting students' reluctance to seek academic assistance. A limitation was that the sample of the study was limited and therefore results could not be generalized. The sample consisted of 30 students, it did not differentiate between gender differences and academic year which are key factors that contribute to stress levels. However, future research needs to be conducted to evaluate differences that exist in stress levels experienced between different genders, cultures, diversity, backgrounds, and years of education. Future research should include a larger more diverse population.To conclude, the findings suggest the need for additional academic support to assist students cope with academic stress and pressures to improve their academic success and physical and mental well-being. Which ties back to the need for resilience to help cope with academic stress as stated by Chen (2024).

Conclusion

The results and findings from the study suggest that stress significantly impacts the academic outcomes, performance, and mental health of CCNY undergraduate students. It was found that significantly high levels of stress lead to a lack of focus, procrastination, and lower academic success. Furthermore, students felt reluctant to seek from professors which further increased the stress experienced by the students. These findings align with prior research signifying the effects of stress on academics. It aligns with previous studies that stress the need for better academic assistance and stress management. Strategies that encourage students to seek help from professors and improve focus and concentration. Collectively previous studies and the survey results from this study signify the need for effective stress managing techniques to cope with stress to improve achieve academic success, improve academic performance to and foster better mental and physical well-being.

References

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