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Does academic stress predict nursing students' healthy and unhealthy behavior?

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ABSTRACT

The study aimed to examine the effect of academic stress on the healthy and unhealthy behaviors of nursing students. To deepen the understanding of these concepts, relevant literature was reviewed. The study employed a descriptive assessment and correlational research design. The population consisted of 228 nursing students from the Divine Word College of Laoag. Data were gathered using questionnaires, and the analysis was conducted using weighted mean and analysis of variance (ANOVA).

The study found that academic stress among students was high, as was healthy behavior, while unhealthy behavior was low. Regarding the correlation between academic stress and healthy behavior, the results indicate that, when considered together, the three dimensions—external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload and examination, and self-efficacy—are not associated with healthy behavior. However, when considered separately, academic stress related to self-efficacy significantly influenced healthy behavior. Higher self-efficacy predicts higher healthy behavior. Additionally, concerning the correlation between academic stress and unhealthy behavior, the findings reveal a significant correlation, indicating that higher academic stress leads to unhealthy behavior.

Introduction

Stress has been a significant concern for many organizations due to its devastating effects on human health and performance, and students are not exempt from this. The causes of stress for students can be multifaceted, ranging from academic-related stressors like exams, homework, and future decisions to nonacademic factors, such as financial resources, heavy workloads, lack of support, social pressures, family conflicts, relationships with parents, and peer interactions (Suldo et al., 2009). Different students respond to these stressors differently because the concept of stress can vary greatly among

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individuals. For some, stress refers to events or situations that cause them to feel pressured and tense, leading to negative emotions like anger or anxiety, while others see it as a response to these situations (Baqutayan, 2015). In other words, each student's level of stress may differ based on how negatively they react to the situation, which can depend on factors such as how much control they have over the situation, the intensity of the stressor, and their perspective (Kenneth et al., 1997). As Neuderth et al. (2009), cited by Bedeway and Gabriel (2015), pointed out, not all students experience the same level of stress given the same stressors.

The American Psychological Association (2024) has identified several common reactions or responses of students at different ages to stress. Kindergarten children may react to stress by complaining of stomachaches and developing habits like hair twirling or thumb-sucking. Unlike kindergarteners, elementary school children may exhibit strange behaviors, such as frequently leaving the classroom, having difficulty staying in their seats, or displaying defiant behavior. Similarly, junior high school students may manifest their stress through defiant behavior, self- isolation, and rebellious actions. Senior high school students often express their stress through anger, isolation, bullying, electronic bullying, and suicidal tendencies (Kuehn et al., 2019). At the college or university level, studies suggest that students may react or respond to stress cognitively or affectively. Cognitive responses to stress may include poor concentration, poor memory, constant worrying, anxiety, and focusing solely on the negative (Attia et al., 2022). Affective responses to stress may manifest as disaffection, passive disengagement, and feelings of distraction and lack of focus (Jackson & Serenko, 2023).

Understanding the prevalence of academic stress, examining its causes, and identifying students' responses to stress can help school administrators provide services that address these issues and improve students' well-being. Therefore, schools must conduct studies to provide a scientific basis for helping students cope with stress in a healthy manner, as psychological interventions have been noted to help prevent related disorders and chronic diseases. However, studies related to identifying the causes of academic stress and the various unhealthy responses of students in the Philippine context, particularly in the Ilocos region, are limited. Thus, the current study aims to contribute to the discussion by identifying stressors related to students' academic stress and providing alternative solutions to the problem. In addition to enriching the discussion, the study also seeks to examine the correlation between academic stress and the unhealthy behaviors of college students at Divine Word College of Laoag.

The study is organized into several sections, including an introduction, literature review, research methodology, data presentation and analysis, results, discussion, and conclusion.

Literature review

The concept of stress

The word “stress” originally came from physics, where it means tension and pressure, and was later adopted by the social and natural sciences. In Latin, it is called “strictus,” meaning tight or narrow, and “stringere,” meaning to tighten. These root words suggest that stress indicates both physiological and

psychological pressure (Jin, 2012). The term was introduced into academic discourse by Selye (1956) in the field of health psychology. Later, other researchers continued to use the term, often associating it with ill health (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). The discussion of stress is unavoidable because it is a human problem that affects everyone, whether a person, a parent, a corporate manager, an employee, a student, or a teacher. According to Selye (1956), the absence of stress can only occur after death. Stress arises from life's demands, such as work demands (Serrano & Costa, 2017) and study demands for students (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). It is an important issue that requires attention due to its devastating effects on human functioning (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2024). Stress affects both the physical and psychological aspects of a person (Schneiderman et al., 2005). A person cannot function well when under stress because it can impact the body, mind, and behavior (Mayo Clinic Staff, 2024; Yaribeygi et al., 2017; Clark et al., 1952). Individual work performance or academic performance can be affected when a worker or a student is experiencing stress. Management has been grappling with how to manage the stress levels of workers to improve productivity. School administrators, too, have given serious attention to providing services for students who experience stress to improve their academic performance.

Stress is inherent to the human experience. People feel it and talk about it, but there is no universally accepted definition of stress. The definition of stress varies from one person to another, from one expert to another, and from one organization to another. There is no common definition of stress (Baqutayan, 2015; Levine, 1985) because different experts and organizations offer different accounts of stress (Martinez, 2014). An earlier definition of stress was provided by Selye (1973), who defined it as a nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it. It is called nonspecific because the response does not depend on the specific type of agent that causes it (Levine, 1985). As the field of psychology has grown, and after Selye (1956) introduced the concept of stress, many discussions and studies have explored the issue. Psychologists have offered various accounts of stress, expanding from Selye's original concept (1950) to include the daily troubles and anxieties of commuters and executives (Levine, 1985). Folkman & Lazarus (1980) define stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and physiological arousal experienced in a threatening situation. Later, Folkman and Lazarus (1984) expanded their earlier definition, describing stress as a psychological, physical, and behavioral response to an event that has the potential for harm or loss, which affects individual well-being. However, they also argued that stress is not always bad because it may help a person grow when they can handle it and learn from it. McGrath (1976) considered stress a substantial imbalance between demand and response capability, where failure to respond adequately can have serious consequences. Mills (1982), as cited by Baqutayan (2015), viewed stress as an inner reaction to what is happening around us and the demands placed upon us. It is an emotional reaction to external stimuli, which Buck (1972) referred to when defining stress as the work of the environment. Buck (1972) considered stress as the pressure of the work environment. In other words, stress is caused by the workplace for employees, and students experience stress due to their studies. Therefore, according to Benjamin and Walz (1990), stress is a product of the interaction between the environment, the nature of stressors, and individual vulnerability to stress. In the same vein, contemporary scientific studies offer three distinct meanings of stress: any environmental stimulus that causes a person to feel tense, an internal mental state of tension, and a physiological reaction to demands or damaging intrusions. Thus, this concept

explains stress as a psychological and physiological response to a stimulus, which is the event. Since stress leads to psychological distress and efforts to cope with the event, McEwen and Seeman (1999), as cited by Levine (1985), argue that physiological stress responses support efforts to cope with the stressful event and protect the organism from harm.

The dimensions of stress presented by the above definitions can be summarized by Palmer (1989), who defined stress as a psychological, physiological, and behavioral response by an individual when they perceive an imbalance between the demands placed upon them and their ability to meet those demands, consequently affecting their physical well-being. In other words, stress occurs when pressures exceed one's capability to cope with them (Palmer et al., 1999). The latest definition is offered by the World Health Organization (WHO, 2023), which defines stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. It is considered a natural human response when facing threats. The American Psychological Association (n.d.) defines stress as the physiological or psychological response to internal and external stressors. Lingen (2008) defines stress as a specific and nonspecific response to external stimuli that disturb a person and challenge their ability to cope.

Based on the various definitions presented above, the current study defines stress as a psychological, physiological, and behavioral response to internal or external stimuli or stressors that can harm a person. This definition guides the investigation of stress among students, specifically academic stress.

Academic stress

Stress is a common mental state for students, as Johnson (1979) argued that 10-30% of students experience some degree of academic stress. O'Neill et al. (2019), Paralkal and Knutson (2021), and Reddy et al. (2018) consider academic stress an important challenge for educational institutions, one that can have a devastating negative effect on students' academic performance. According to Jimenez-Mijangos et al. (2022), stress and anxiety are identified as the leading reasons why students fail in their academic endeavors. Understanding academic stress and its stressors will help teachers and administrators design programs to improve students' well-being. Interventions cannot be implemented without a clear understanding of academic stress and its causes. Thus, elaborating on the concept is necessary to gain a complete understanding and design

intervention programs, which can only be achieved by reviewing previous studies conducted by various researchers. Different authors and researchers have presented the concept of academic stress differently. Jagiello et al. (2024) and Pascoe et al. (2020) define academic stress as the transient experience of pressure, anxiety, or distress related to the fear of failure in achieving academic goals. Wilks (2008) defines it as the body's response to academic demands that exceed students' capabilities. David (2010) and Hafeez et al. (2022) view stress as the feeling of being overwhelmed by numerous academic assignments or homework, pessimism about assignment outcomes, and feelings of inadequacy. Sun et al. (2011) consider academic stress as discomfort and anxiety caused by the various challenges of academic learning experiences. These definitions emphasize stress as psychological and physical discomfort resulting from work overloads and the ability to cope.

Many studies have found that academic stress is associated with students' perceptions of their capability to achieve academic goals (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Kristensen et al., 2023; McKay et al., 2014). Kumaraswamy (2013) noted that academic stress is caused by excessive assignments, peer competition, examinations, and time management. Additional causes of academic stress include an excessive academic course load, financial concerns, family pressure, and adapting to a new environment (Misra & Castillo, 2004; Byrd & McKinney, 2012; Pedrelli et al., 2015). When stress is associated with academic concerns, students' stress levels often elevate before tests (Spielberger & Vaag, 1995) and assignment deadlines (Ma, 2023). Since stress is linked to the perception of capability, it is also noted that the level of academic stress varies from one student to another depending on their perceived ability to perform academic tasks (Barbayannis et al., 2022). For instance, Lee et al. (2021) observed that the perception of academic stress varies among college students. For example, female and male college students experience different levels of stress. Misra et al. (2000), Eisenberg et al. (2007), and Evans et al. (2018) argued that female college students experience more stress than their male counterparts because they respond differently to stressors (Misra et al., 2000; Verma et al., 2011). It has also been found that the academic year of study influences the level of academic stress (Misra et al., 2000). Just as stress does not affect all people equally, academic stress does not affect all students equally (Yumba, 2010).

The effects of academic stress vary from one student to another. However, studies related to the positive effects of stress are limited. Most studies focus on the negative effects of stress, such as its impact on mental and physical well-being and reduced academic performance (Barbayannis et al., 2022; Deng et al., 2022; Kaur, 2012; Córdova Olivera et al., 2023). Besides the negative effects on well-being and academic performance, researchers also suggest that academic stress can have positive effects on academic performance. For example, Hasanah et al. (2023) and Ma (2023) pointed out the relationship between academic stress and academic performance, suggesting that academic pressure can motivate students to study well and be more diligent. Studies argue that an appropriate level of academic stress can improve academic performance,

creating a positive relationship between academic stress and achievement (Murdiana et al., 2023), as pressure can increase resilience, motivation, and the ability to handle challenges effectively (Ardi, 2022).

Academic stress and students' coping mechanism

Just as stress does not affect all people equally, the same is true for academic stress. Academic stress should not always lead to negative outcomes when a student knows how to change their perception of the stressors (Yumba, 2010). When a person perceives stressors as highly negative, it consequently heightens the level of negative emotions (Hammen, 2015). The same applies to academic stress. As Bedewy and Gabriel (2015) pointed out, not all students experience stress at the same level. When a student views stressors as highly negative, it affects their psychological and physical well-being, but if students consider stressors as positive, it can serve as motivation (Ardi, 2012; Murdiana et al., 2023) and improve their academic performance.

Following the above findings, it is clear that not all students perceive stressors in the same way. Scott (2023) pointed out three reasons why people experience different levels of stress: resources (external resources like money, help from people, job/food security, and internal resources including knowledge of coping mechanisms, life experience, courage/resilience), body (everyone's body handles stress differently, causing some people to be more sensitive and reactive to stress), and perception of the situation (each person interprets events differently). A study also suggested that positive and negative perceptions of stressors influence the differences in stress between students, which suggests that a positive mindset can result in lower stress levels (Zhao et al., 2023). Selye (1983) argued that the stress response results in positive or negative outcomes, and such outcomes are based on the interpretation of physical symptoms or physiological experiences. In other words, stress can become "eustress" (positive) or distress (negative). Consequently, different perceptions lead to different coping mechanisms.

Thus, the coping mechanisms for stress can vary from one person to another, and Walinga (2008) has identified different types of coping mechanisms, which are categorized as cognitive (therapy, hobbies, meditation, mindfulness, planning, reading, time management), physical (artistic expression, deep breathing, natural medicine, physical exercise, relaxation, yoga), environmental (music, nature, pets, spa visits), and other (conflict resolution, prayer). Folkman and Lazarus (1988) and Lazarus and Folkman (1987) present a cognitive coping strategy to address stress, where a person uses mental activity to manage a stressful event. Mental activity includes examining whether they have the resources to address the stressors, understanding the causes of the problems, identifying the steps to be taken to solve the issue, and thinking about pleasant experiences instead of the current difficulty. If cognitive coping fails, one may switch to a different coping strategy, either problem-focused coping or emotion-focused coping (Folkman & Lazarus, 1980; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Problem-focused coping, or active coping, suggests that the problem should be addressed to eliminate it. In addition to active coping, Wood and Bhatnagar (2015) also suggest passive coping, which involves maladaptive strategies when faced

with stressful situations, such as negative self-targeting and avoidance. Maladaptive strategies manifest through behaviors that interfere with an individual's daily activities, like substance use, avoidance, withdrawal, passive-aggressiveness, self-harm, and risky sexual behavior. Emotion- focused coping means regulating the physiological, emotional, cognitive, and behavioral reactions to the stressors (Ben-Zur, 2020). Emotion-focused coping is expressed through wishful thinking, distancing (trying to forget the whole thing), emphasizing the positive lessons from negative experiences, positive refocusing, and putting things in perspective (Lazarus & Folkman, 1987).

Healthy and Unhealthy Behavior

There are different ways for people to escape from stressful situations, and they apply various stress-coping mechanisms. Some take stress positively as motivation to improve performance and thus adopt positive measures to handle it, such as taking a break, taking care of themselves, making time to unwind, talking to friends, or joining organizations (Lingen, 2008). However, others may react negatively, immediately releasing stress through unhealthy behaviors like smoking, alcohol consumption, drug abuse, fighting, physical inactivity, poor diet, irregular breakfast, and insufficient sleep (Friedman, 2001; Lazzeri et al., 2014). Jacob (2024) identified six unhealthy habits: smoking, not getting enough exercise, not getting enough sleep, drinking mindlessly, not drinking enough water, and eating late at night.

Vereecken et al. (2004), Richter and Leppin (2007), Ravens-Sieberer et al. (2004), and Vuille and Schenkel (2001) noted that unhealthy behaviors among students are associated with low academic achievement and poor emotional well-being. Additionally, smoking, alcohol use, and physical inactivity are often related to the size of the peer group and the frequency of peer contact (ter Bogt et al., 2006; Settertobulte & de Matos, 2004).

Studies show that college students often engage in unhealthy behaviors, leading to negative outcomes and further risky behavior (Shank et al., 2024). Maniaci et al. (2021) noted the negative outcomes of unhealthy behavior. The study highlighted that healthy behavior is a predictor of academic achievement, while unhealthy behavior leads to academic failure. The same study argued that a good diet and non-problematic internet use are predictors of academic success. Thus, the study recommends practicing healthy lifestyle behaviors to improve academic performance. According to Sogari et al. (2018), physical inactivity and unhealthy dietary habits are among the main behaviors that potentially harm young adolescents.

Research Questions:

Building on the theoretical and conceptual framework, this study aims to investigate the impact of academic stress on students' unhealthy behaviors. Specifically, it seeks to answer the following questions:

1. What is the academic stress of students in terms of:
a. External expectation
b. Course requirement overload
c. lack of self-efficacy

2. What are the healthy and unhealthy behaviors of students?

3. Is there a relationship between academic stress and unhealthy behavior?

Hypothesis

Academic stress has been identified as a contributing factor to low academic performance and dropout rates (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Kristensen et al., 2023; McKay et al., 2014). This study hypothesizes that academic stress also influences students' unhealthy behaviors.

Research Methodology

The study employs a quantitative approach using a descriptive assessment and correlational research design. Conducted at Divine Word College of Laoag, the research focuses on fourth- year college students. Data collection is carried out through questionnaires, with statistical analysis involving both descriptive and inferential methods, specifically utilizing weighted mean and Pearson's r.

To begin data collection, the researcher obtained approval from the college president to distribute the questionnaires. Designated employee representatives facilitated the distribution process. Ethical considerations were addressed, and due to the non-sensitive nature of the study, an ethical review was waived.

The following ranges of values with their descriptive interpretations were used:

Statistical Range	***Descriptive Interpretation***
4.21-5.00	*Strongly Agree/Very High*
3.41-4.20	*Agree/High*
2.61-3.40	*Somewhat Agree/Moderate*
1.81-2.60	*Disagree/Low*
1.00-1.80	*Strongly Disagree/Very Low*

Data Presentation and Analysis

The data presentation follows the statement of the problems of the study.

Problem 1: What is the academic stress of students in terms of

a. External expectations

b. Course requirement overload

c. lack of self-efficacy Table 1: Academic stress

	Indicators	**Weighted Mean**	**DI**
	External pressure and expectations. ***I am stressed because:***		
1	I am ashamed of my friends if I will get low grades	3.09	Moderate
2	I don't want to be looked down on by my teachers, friends and parents	3.96	High
3	I do not want to fail my parent's expectations	4.46	Very high
4	I am worried about my future if I fail my study	4.50	Very high
	Composite Mean	**4.00**	**High**
	Course requirement overload and examination. ***I am stressed because:***		
1	I enrolled in many subjects and each subject has requirements	3.43	High
2	I am rushed to finish my many assignments	3.51	High
3	I am worried that I cannot meet the deadline	4.06	High
4	I am afraid if I fail the coming examination	4.43	High
	Composite mean	**3.85**	**High**
	Self-Efficacy. *I am stressed because:*		
1	I am worried if I can answer the examination correctly	3.79	High
2	I am not confident that I can finish my study	2.68	Moderate
3	I am not confident that I can focus on schoolwork when faced with many distractions	3.42	High
4	I am not confident that I can meet the deadline with few reminders from teachers	3.17	Moderate
	Composite mean	**3.27**	**Moderate**
	Overall:	**3.71**	**High**

Source: Jagiello, et al (2024).

Legend:

Statistical Range	***Descriptive Interpretation***
4.21-5.00	*Strongly Agree/Very High*
3.41-4.20	*Agree/High*
2.61-3.40	*Somewhat Agree/Moderate*
1.81-2.60	*Disagree/Low*
1.00-1.80	*Strongly Disagree/Very Low*

Based on the data in the table, it reveals that the academic stress of nursing students has an overall mean rating of 3.70, which is interpreted as "agree/high." This mean rating suggests that while the academic stress of nursing students is not extremely high, it is consistently perceived as high rather than low or moderate. Even when the dimensions are considered individually, they are all rated within the same high-level mean rating.

Regarding academic stress related to external pressures and expectations, students agree that they feel stressed due to concerns about disappointing their friends, parents, and teachers if they

receive low grades and they do not want to fail their parents. Pedersen (2021) noted that stress and shame are closely related. Semmer et al. (2019) pointed out that protecting self-esteem and social esteem is a significant source of pressure, and self-esteem and social esteem can be damaged by experiences of failure.

Another cause of academic stress for students is the overload of course requirements and examinations. Students agree that they experience stress because they are enrolled in many subjects, which require numerous assignments to be submitted on time, and they also agree that examinations contribute to their stress. Gohar-Abbas and Roger (2013) and Jensen et al. (2023) argued that course overload and examinations are major sources of stress for students.

A third cause of academic stress is related to academic self-efficacy. Students agree that they feel stressed because they are uncertain about their ability to answer examination questions correctly, lack confidence in their focus on their studies, and worry about completing their coursework. Numerous studies have identified self-efficacy as a significant trigger of academic stress (Kristensen et al., 2023; Zajacova et al., 2023; Chen et al., 2024).

Problem 2: What are the healthy and unhealthy behaviors of students? Table 2: Healthy and unhealthy behavior

No	**Healthy Behavior**	**Weighted Mean**	**DI**
	When I am stressed:		
1	I take a break	3.91	High
2	I talk to friends	3.85	High
3	I take care of myself not to get sick.	3.73	High
4	I take time to unwind	3.58	High
5	I join other organizations or groups like sports, music, dance, and others	2.56	Low
	Composite mean	**3.53**	**High**
	Unhealthy behavior		
	If I am under stress:		
1	1. I used to smoke cigarettes	1.44	Very low
2	I used to join my friends to drink alcohol	1.86	Low
3	I watched movies, tik- tok and slept late at night	3.59	High
4	I ate a lot and forgot my diet	3.30	Moderate
5	I escaped breakfast	3.64	High
	Composite mean	**2.77**	**Moderate**
	Overall mean	**3.15**	**Moderate**

Source, Abun (2024).

As indicated by the data, the healthy and unhealthy behaviors of students obtained composite mean ratings of 3.52 (high) and 2.76 (moderate), respectively. This suggests that students' healthy behaviors are higher than their unhealthy behaviors. Regarding healthy behaviors, students agree that when they are stressed, they take a break, talk to friends, take care of themselves to avoid getting sick, make time to unwind, and join other groups. Researchers have revealed that stress does not always lead to negative or unhealthy behavior; it can also result in healthy or positive behavior (Ingledew et al., 2013; Wills, 1987). Wills (1987) further pointed out that people under stress often seek help from family, friends, or larger community members.

However, the study's results also indicate that students sometimes respond to stress negatively. They agree that when stressed, they watch TikTok, sleep late, skip breakfast, and overeat, although they disagree that smoking is a healthy way to handle stress. Researchers have confirmed that negative behaviors are commonly adopted by students as coping strategies, particularly among male students (Joseph et al., 2020; Almomani et al., 2021). Almomani et al. (2021) further suggest that students need to be guided toward healthier coping strategies.

Problem 3: Is there a relationship between academic stress and healthy and unhealthy behavior?

Table 3: Relationship between academic stress and healthy behavior

The multiple regression analysis between the students' academic stress factors such as external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload and examination, and self-efficacy taken together could not significantly predict the students' healthy behavior, F (3, 222) = 2.531, p = >.05 with 3.30 per cent overlap between the three predictor variables and the students' healthy behavior.

This suggests that the students' healthy behavior remains the same regardless of the differences in their academic stress along with external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload and examination, and self-efficacy.

However, when the academic stress factors were taken separately, self-efficacy significantly predicted the students' behavior B = .140, $p < .05$, 3.272 quantified the Y-intercept for the equation.

This implies that the variations in the students' healthy behavior are attributed to the differences in their academic stress along with self-efficacy.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.182[a]	.033	.020	.86277

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy, External Pressure and Expectations, Course Requirement Overload and Examination

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	5.653	3	1.884	2.531	.060[b]
	Residual	165.250	222	.744		
	Total	170.902	225			

a. Dependent Variable: Healthy Behavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self-Efficacy, External Pressure and Expectations, Course Requirement Overload and Examination

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	3.272	.355		9.225	.000
	External Pressure and Expectations	.070	.084	.064	.838	.403
	Course Requirement Overload and Examination	.140	.090	.121	1.555	.121
	Self Efficacy	-.169	.072	-.170	-2.360	.019

a. Dependent Variable: Healthy Behavior

Table 4: Is there a relationship between academic stress and unhealthy behavior?

When the academic stress factors such as external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload and examination, and self-efficacy were taken together, they could significantly predict the students' unhealthy behavior, F (3,222) = 7.914, p <.01 with 9.70 per cent overlap between the three predictors and the outcome variable students' unhealthy behavior.

These results denote that the observed differences in the students' unhealthy behavior are due to the variations in their academic stress in terms of external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload and examination, and self-efficacy.

However, when the three academic stress factors were considered separately, only self-efficacy B =.160, p <.01 and course requirement and overload and examination B =.184, p <.05, 1.631 quantified the Y-intercept for the regression equation.

These findings imply that when academic stress factors were considered separately, only the students' level of self-efficacy, course requirements and overload, and examinations contributed to the variations observed in the students' unhealthy behavior.

Thus, the differences observed in students' unhealthy behavior are attributable to variations in their self-efficacy, course requirements and overload, and examinations.

Model Summary

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.311[a]	.097	.084	.67993

a. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy, External Pressure and Expectations, Course Requirement Overload and Examination

ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	10.976	3	3.659	7.914	.000[b]
	Residual	102.631	222	.462		
	Total	113.607	225			

a. Dependent Variable: Unhealthy Behavior

b. Predictors: (Constant), Self Efficacy, External Pressure and Expectations, Course Requirement Overload and Examination

Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	1.631	.279		5.835	.000
	External Pressure and Expectations	-.023	.066	-.026	-.353	.725
	Course Requirement Overload and Examination	.184	.071	.195	2.595	.010
	Self Efficacy	.160	.056	.197	2.825	.005

a. Dependent Variable: Unhealthy Behavior

Results and Discussion

The results of the current study show that academic stress has a greater influence on unhealthy behavior than on healthy behavior. Regarding the influence of academic stress on healthy behavior, the results indicate that external pressure and course requirement overload do not affect students' healthy behavior, with the exception of self-efficacy. Self-efficacy predicts students' healthy behavior, meaning that the more students believe in their ability to handle their studies, the more they engage in positive or healthy behavior when dealing with stress. Uglanova (2014) and Barnett (2014) noted that higher self-confidence enhances positive intentions and actions, as well as fosters a more optimistic view of the future.

In terms of the influence of academic stress on unhealthy behavior, the results indicate that external pressure and expectations, self-efficacy, and course requirement overload and examinations all affect the level of unhealthy behavior. This implies that when students experience stress due to external pressures, course overload, and low self-efficacy—defined as a lack of belief in their ability to complete academic requirements—they are more likely to exhibit negative behavior. These results suggest that deans, registrars, and the vice president for academic affairs should avoid assigning subjects beyond students' intellectual capacities. Additionally, guidance counselors and school administrators should implement programs designed to enhance students' academic self-efficacy, as recommended by Çınar-Tanrıverdi and Karabacak-Çelik (2023). Therefore, regular academic counseling should be provided by the school.

Conclusion

The study aimed to investigate the effect of academic stress on the healthy and unhealthy behavior of nursing students. The study found that overall academic stress among students is considered high, with healthy behavior being high and unhealthy behavior moderate. In terms of the correlation between academic stress and healthy behavior, considering the three dimensions of academic stress—external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload, and self- efficacy—the analysis of variance suggests that there is no significant correlation. However, when considered individually, academic stress related to self-efficacy is associated with healthy behavior, meaning that higher self-efficacy leads to healthier behavior.

Regarding the relationship between academic stress and unhealthy behavior, the findings indicate that academic stress, along with external pressure and expectations, course requirement overload, examinations, and self-efficacy, is significantly related to unhealthy behavior. This suggests that external pressure, low self-efficacy, and course requirement overload trigger unhealthy behavior among nursing students.

Author's contribution

The whole paper is the product of a researcher whose name is attached to this paper.

Institutional Review Board Statement: Ethical review and approval were waived for this study, and the research does not deal with vulnerable groups or sensitive issues.

Data Availability Statement: The data presented in this study are available on request from the corresponding author. The data are not publicly available due to privacy.

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