

**Research Note**

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## A Study on University Students' Stress Levels during the COVID-19 Pandemic

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### ABSTRACT

The current study assessed the stress levels of students of Kerala Agricultural University during the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample size was 200. Twenty-four variables were taken for the study which revealed that majority of the students was in a distressed condition, during the pandemic period.

**Keywords:** COVID-19 pandemic; Stress; University; Students; Kerala

The recent outbreak of COVID-19 virus has resulted in the sudden suspension of schools, colleges, universities and other government institutions. Amidst these hard times, teachers have been utilizing e-learning platforms to impart education to the students. The drastic change from traditional real-time teaching to virtual learning has created a greater impact among students. The current digital learning methodologies are uncommon to most students. The study aims to assess the University students' stress levels, during the COVID-19 pandemic with the following objectives.

- To analyze the most common stress causing variables.
- To conduct gender wise stress analysis.

### METHODOLOGY

The study solely depended upon the primary data. Undergraduates (including professional students) of various streams in Kerala Agricultural University who are studying within Thrissur District, Kerala during the COVID-19 pandemic were taken into consideration. Data were collected through a combination of structured and a self-designed questionnaire, administered through Google forms. Convenience sampling technique was used to collect the information from 200 undergraduate students. The data collected from these students were analyzed with the help of appropriate statistical tools.

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## Research Instrument

**University Stress Scale (USS):** In this study, for assessing the stress level of UG students, University Stress Scale (USS) was employed. This stress scale was proposed by Stallman (2008). There is a pre-structured questionnaire in which there are 21 variables to measure the stress level of University students over the past month (Stallman and Hurst 2016). The responses for each variable were represented in a four-

point scale; not at all, sometimes, frequently & constantly and the scores were assigned as 0, 1, 2 and 3 respectively. Depending on the values to each response, individual scores were calculated and scores were classified based on a range of scores. The range of score was 0-63. So, the minimum and maximum score that an individual can pursue is 0 and 63 respectively. A score greater than or equal to 13 is predictive of significant psychological distress.

### Score range defining various levels of stress in Under Graduate students

Score	Interpretation
Less than 13	No significant psychological distress
Greater than or equal to 13	Significant psychological distress

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### Analysis of Stress Level of Students

The stress level of University students was assessed and are presented in Tables 1 & 2

**Table 1. Score Range of Various Levels of Stress among Students**

Score	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Interpretation
Less than 13	94	46	No significant psychological distress
Greater than or equal to 13	106	54	Significant psychological distress

The result shows that the majority of students (54%) were in a psychologically distressing condition during the pandemic. The pandemic situation fastens the stress level of each and every individual. So obviously the students are under stress as

the prolonged closure of colleges made the academic demands tighter than as it was. Such a drastic change from traditional learning to online learning can also create huge acceptability problems among students as they do not have any complete

exposure towards e-learning, as physical learning could not happen. Lack of socialization and restrictions in entertainment due to the pandemic also disrupted the mental well-being of individuals, especially youngsters. Dwivedi (2020) proved that there is an existence of stress in students as well as a communication gap between teachers and students during online learning in this COVID-19 pandemic situation. There are

several reasons for being in a stressed condition. Some of the most common stress causing variables (stressors) were identified for the study. The most common stressors were identified by adding the responses under the heads of 'frequently' and 'constantly' and the respective percentage composition was calculated. The higher the total percentage composition, the higher would be the stress associated with that particular variable.

**Table 2. Analysis of Most Common Stressors**

Sl.No.	Stressors	Frequently % (n)	Constantly % (n)	Total % (n)
1.	Academic/coursework demands	17.5(35)	10.5(21)	28(56)
2.	Procrastination	18.5(37)	8.5(17)	27(54)
3.	University/college environment	12.5(25)	18(36)	30.5(61)
4.	Finances and money problems	11.5(23)	10.5(21)	22(44)
5.	Housing/accommodation	5(10)	2(4)	7(14)
6.	Transport	10.5(21)	3(6)	13.5(27)
7.	Mental health problems	16.5(33)	6.5(13)	23(46)
8.	Physical health problems	15(30)	6.5(13)	21.5(43)
9.	Parenting issues	7(14)	3(6)	10(20)
10.	Childcare	4(8)	2(4)	6(12)
11.	Family relationships	9.5(19)	2.5(5)	12(24)
12.	Friendships	13.5(27)	6.5(13)	20(40)
13.	Romantic relationships	5(10)	3.5(7)	8.5(17)
14.	Relationship breakdown	5(10)	2(4)	7(14)
15.	Work	11(22)	5(10)	16(32)
16.	Parental expectations	11(22)	4(8)	15(30)
17.	Study/life balance	16.5(33)	11(22)	27.5(55)
18.	Discrimination	5.5(11)	3(6)	8.5(17)
19.	Sexual orientation issues	4.5(9)	1(2)	5.5(11)
20.	Language/cultural issues	7.5(15)	1.5(3)	9(18)
21.	Other demands	17.5(35)	10(20)	27.5(55)

From the table, it is clear that the most common stressors were lack of physical accessibility to the college environment followed by course work demands, study balance & other demands (futuristic thoughts, need for a job etc.) and procrastination (delaying or postponing the things that have to be done). Most of the students had been stressed due to academic related demands. Hence, the respondents had suggested providing relaxation for submitting assignments, projects and all other demands in a lenient manner. For

getting the students accustomed with this new setup, online webinars on motivation, job orientation, higher studies, valid certificate courses etc could be organized. Sexual orientation issue was the least common stressor followed by child care, accommodation and relationship breakdown.

### Gender-wise Stress Analysis

A gender-wise stress analysis was performed and the results are presented in Table.3.

**Table 3. Gender Wise Stress Analysis**

	Male		Female		Total	
	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Frequency	Percentage (%)
<b>Stressed</b>	35	64.8	71	48.6	106	54
<b>Not Stressed</b>	19	35.2	75	51.4	94	46
<b>Total</b>	<b>54</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>146</b>	<b>100</b>	<b>200</b>	<b>100</b>

From the table, it is clear that male students were more stressed than the female students. In Kerala, in general, the society is much concerned about the job status of graduates. Separate attention need to be given to both male and female students, since the male students were more stressed.

It is evident from the results of the study that the majority of the students were under stressed conditions due to the effect of several stressors associated with the students. The University should take note of the major stressors and formulate

strategies to overcome them as a long-term measure.

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