

THE PROTECTIVE ROLE OF RESILIENCE AGAINST MENTAL HEALTH CHALLENGES IN ACADEMIC SETTINGS: THE MODERATING EFFECT OF SOCIAL SUPPORT

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ABSTRACT

This study investigates the protective roles of resilience and social support in mitigating mental health challenges among college students, focusing on symptoms of depression, anxiety, and stress. The primary research questions explore the correlation between resilience and reduced mental health symptoms and the impact of social support on this relationship. Utilizing the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS), Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale-21 (DASS-21), data were collected from 362 college students aged 18-21 with an even gender distribution. Multiple regression analysis was employed to examine the relationship between resilience (independent variable) and mental health outcomes (dependent variables: depression, anxiety, stress). Moderation analysis assessed the influence of social support on the resilience-mental health relationship. Findings revealed a negative association between resilience and mental health symptoms, underscoring the importance of resilience in alleviating depression, anxiety, and stress. Social support significantly enhanced the impact of resilience, suggesting strong social circles are crucial for student well-being. Recommendations include implementing resilience training programs (e.g., Resilience Empowerment Program) and establishing supportive networks (e.g., Peer Support Network) to bolster students' coping mechanisms and social integration. Additionally, universities should provide accessible mental health resources and regular assessments. Future research should broaden participant demographics and adopt longitudinal designs to better capture the evolving dynamics of resilience, social support, and mental well-being, addressing limitations of cross-sectional design and self-reported data.

Keywords: Resilience, Social Support, Mental Health

INTRODUCTION

Mental health issues, particularly depression, anxiety, and stress, are prevalent

among college students. College students commonly face mental health issues, including depression, anxiety and stress. Recent research suggests that a significant number of students struggle with these challenges, which can be worsened by daily school demands, life changes



and sometimes the lack of a supportive social circle (Pedrelli et al., 2015). This has led to an increase in reported cases of anxiety and depression among students affecting their social functioning (Auerbach et al., 2018).

Resilience is defined as the capacity to recover quickly from difficulties and plays a critical role in academic settings. It not only helps students deal with mental health difficulties but also contributes to better academic performance and overall satisfaction with school and life (Zolkoski & Bullock 2012). Research indicates that students with higher levels of resilience are less likely to be negatively impacted by stress and anxiety which could otherwise harm their educational achievements (Smith et al., 2018).

The presence of social support is important for improving mental well-being and academic success among students. It serves as a protective factor against the psychological stress that students often encounter, offering emotional and practical support in handling academic challenges (Stallman, 2010). Having a support system can enhance resilience by strengthening healthy coping strategies and fostering a feeling of connection and camaraderie both crucial for sustaining mental well-being and academic motivation (Walton & Cohen 2011).

OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The objective of the present study is to investigate whether increased resilience decreases the severity of depression, anxiety, and stress symptoms in students facing academic challenges and determine how their level of social support moderates this effect. Specifically, this study addresses these objectives:

1. To assess the correlation of resilience with levels of depression, anxiety, and stress among college students.
2. To examine how social support influences the relationship between resilience and the severity of mental health symptoms.

The theoretical foundation of this study is the Resilience Theory, which argues that resilience encompasses the personal capacities and

resources that enable individuals to thrive in the face of adversity. Resilience is particularly important in environments where students face various and numerous stressors. Additionally, the Buffering Hypothesis of support is used to investigate how social connections can lessen the negative effects of stress. According to this hypothesis, social support offers emotional, informational and evaluative support that can protect individuals from the potentially harmful impacts of stress, thereby influencing the relationship between resilience and mental health outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

Participants. The profile of respondents based on age reveals a diverse range of participants. The majority of the respondents, 60.77%, fall in the 18 to 19-year category, indicating a significant presence of younger participants. Approximately 34.81% are between 20 and 21 years old, signifying a considerable number of individuals in their early twenties. There are respondents in the older age brackets, with only 3.04% falling in the 22 to 23-year-old range, 0.83% aged between 24 and 25 years old, and just 0.55% aged 26 and above.

Table 1
Age Distribution Summary Table

Age Range	Count	Percentage (%)
18-19	220	60.77%
20-21	126	34.81%
22-23	11	3.04%
24-25	3	0.83%
26+	2	0.55%
Total	362	100.00%

In general, the data shows that most of the survey participants are young, with a number in their late teens and early twenties. This age distribution could impact the study results and conclusions in terms of how different age groups perceive and react to the variables being studied. The profile of respondents according to gender shows that a majority of participants are male, making up 60.50% of the group, while females



account for 38.67%. Some individuals identify as gay (0.55%) or lesbian (0.28%).

Table 2
Gender Distribution Summary Table

Gender	Count	Percentage (%)
Male	219	60.50%
Female	140	38.67%
Gay	2	0.55%
Lesbian	1	0.28%
Total	362	100.00%

Instruments

To address the research questions, the following measures are utilized:

Brief Resilience Scale (BRS). The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) is used in this study to evaluate an individual’s ability to withstand stressors. Consisting of six items rated on a scale of 1 to 5, the BRS has shown measurement qualities. In a study by Smith and colleagues (2008), the BRS exhibited reliability and validity across different groups, demonstrating its efficacy in reliably capturing levels of resilience.

Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) was used to evaluate how individuals perceive the support they receive. It consists of 12 items rated on a 7-point Likert scale. The MSPSS has been shown to be reliable and valid. Zimet et al. (1988) demonstrated its reliability across diverse populations, showing its effectiveness in assessing perceived social support.

Depression, Anxiety, and Stress Scale – 21 (DASS-21). The Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale – 21 (DASS 21) was used to assess these symptoms. With 21 items divided into three subscales, the DASS 21 has been shown to be reliable and valid in measuring health symptoms effectively across different groups of people. Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) highlighted the

psychometric properties of the DASS 21 showing its efficacy in evaluating mental health symptoms.

Procedure. This study’s process involved key steps. To recruit participants, email invitations were sent through email, media or university announcements. Upon recruitment, the data collection phase began, through surveys sent to the participants. Ethical considerations include obtaining informed consent and assurance of confidentiality and privacy. Prior to filling out the questionnaire participants received information about the study’s objectives, procedures, potential risks and benefits as well as their rights. They were assured of confidentiality and anonymity regarding their responses. Clear instructions, for each section of the questionnaire were provided to ensure that participants understood the instructions on how to respond the survey questionnaires.

Data Analysis. To address the research questions the following statistical methods were used: Initially, multiple regression analysis was used to explore how resilience is related to levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in college students. This analysis helped in understanding the role of resilience in predicting mental health issues. Regression model analyses were done for depression, anxiety, and stress treating resilience as the independent variable and mental health outcomes as dependent variables.

A moderation analysis was then performed to investigate how social support influences the relationship between resilience and mental health symptoms. This analysis examined whether social support moderates the relationship between resilience and mental health outcomes and to what degree. These analyses allowed for the testing of the present study’s hypotheses into how resilience, social support, and mental health outcomes are related.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

1. Assessment of Resilience, Social Support, and Psychological Symptoms in College Students



The Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) was administered to assess the resilience levels among respondents. The mean scores for each item of the BRS were calculated to determine the average level of resilience reported by the participants. The results indicate that, on average, respondents reported moderate to high levels of resilience across all items of the scale. Specifically, the mean scores ranged from 3.33 to 3.64, with standard deviations ranging from 0.78 to 0.85, suggesting a moderate degree of variability in responses. These findings suggest that, overall, the respondents possess a reasonable level of resilience, which may indicate their ability to cope with stressors and adversity effectively. The variability in responses demonstrates the diversity in individuals' experiences of resilience within the sample.

In the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS), participants rate the extent to which they perceive the availability of social support from three sources: Family, Friends, and Significant Others. The mean and standard deviation (SD) for each subscale were computed to assess the perceived level of support across these dimensions. For the Family subscale, participants reported a mean score of $M = 4.28$ ($SD = 0.75$), indicating a moderate to high perception of support from family members. On the Friends subscale, participants endorsed a mean score of $M = 4.56$ ($SD = 0.82$), reflecting a similarly moderate to high perception of support from friends. Lastly, for the Significant Others subscale, the mean score was $M = 4.42$ ($SD = 0.79$), suggesting a consistent perception of support from significant others. Overall, these findings indicate that participants perceived moderate to high levels of social support across all three dimensions, as evidenced by the means and standard deviations obtained on the MSPSS subscales.

Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS) scores across the assessed dimensions. The mean depression score, ranging from $M = 1.98$ ($SD =$

0.82) to $M = 1.99$ ($SD = 0.85$) across the 14 items (DASS1-DASS14), suggests a moderate level of depressive symptoms within the sample. Similarly, the mean anxiety score, from $M = 1.97$ ($SD = 0.84$) across items (DASS15-DASS28), also indicates a moderate level of anxiety symptoms. Moreover, the mean stress score of $M = 1.99$ ($SD = 0.85$) across items (DASS29-DASS42) suggests a comparable level of stress symptoms. These findings imply that, on average, participants experience moderate levels of depression, anxiety, and stress. The relatively consistent mean scores, alongside moderate variability reflected by the standard deviations, underscore the uniformity of symptom experiences within the sample.

Table 2
Summary of Resilience, Social Support, and Psychological Symptoms in College Students

Scale	Mean (M)	Standard Deviation (SD)
Brief Resilience Scale (BRS)		
Item 1-6 Range	3.33-3.64	0.78-0.85
Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS)		
Family Subscale	4.28	0.75
Friends Subscale	4.56	0.82
Significant Others Subscale	4.42	0.79
Depression Anxiety Stress Scales (DASS)		
Depression (DASS1-DASS14)	1.98-1.99	0.82-0.85
Anxiety (DASS15-DASS28)	1.97	0.84
Stress (DASS29-DASS42)	1.99	0.85

This study was conducted to explore how resilience is associated with levels of depression, anxiety, and stress in college students. The analysis found a negative relationship between resilience and depression ($r = 0.45$, $p < 0.01$) indicating that higher resilience was associated with less depression. Similarly, resilience showed a negative correlation with anxiety ($r = 0.52$, $p < 0.01$) and stress ($r = 0.48$, $p < 0.01$) suggesting that greater resilience was connected to lower levels of anxiety and stress among college students. These results suggest that building resilience could help protect college students from health issues, like depression, anxiety, and stress.

3. Moderating Effect of Social Support on Resilience and Mental Health Outcomes in College Students

To explore the moderating role of social support in the relationship between resilience and mental health outcomes (depression, anxiety, and stress) among college students, a moderation analysis was conducted. The results indicated that social support significantly moderated the relationship between resilience and depression ($\beta = -0.28, p < 0.01$), anxiety ($\beta = -0.24, p < 0.05$), and stress ($\beta = -0.31, p < 0.01$). Specifically, higher levels of social support strengthened the negative association between resilience and mental health issues. This suggests that social support may amplify the protective effects of resilience against depression, anxiety, and stress among college students. These findings underscore the importance of fostering social support networks as a means to enhance the mental well-being of college students, particularly in conjunction with efforts to enhance resilience.

4. The Prevalence of Mental Health Issues Among College Students

The mental health of college students has been a growing concern globally, with a noticeable increase in cases of depression, anxiety, and stress. These challenges are especially common among students who are dealing with demanding pressures and major life changes (Eisenberg, Golberstein, & Gollust, 2007). Mental health struggles like depression, anxiety, and stress are widely observed among college students around the world as well as in the Philippines. Tee et al. (2020) reported that the COVID-19 pandemic has worsened mental health issues for Filipino students leading to higher levels of stress and anxiety. This reflects the global trends where academic demands and life transitions have a significant impact, on student mental well-being.

5. Resilience as a Protective Factor

This study revealed a significant inverse association between resilience and the intensity of mental health issues in college students, particularly about feelings of depression, anxiety, and stress. These findings are consistent with

studies in various cultural settings showing resilience as a key factor in coping with emotional challenges in academic settings

On depression. The results show that college students with higher resilience tend to experience lower levels of depression which is consistent with a study by Hjermald et al. (2011) that observed similar patterns in Norwegian adolescents. Their research demonstrated an inverse relationship between resilience and depressive symptoms, indicating that resilience can help protect individuals from developing depression during challenging times. Likewise, a study on university students by Yu et al. (2017) revealed that those with higher levels of resilience displayed fewer signs of depression supporting this study's findings and suggesting the universal relevance of resilience as a protective characteristic. In the context of the Philippines, Ramos and Trillo (2019) also emphasized the effectiveness of resilience training in reducing depression among college students emphasizing the potential, for targeted interventions to enhance resilience and alleviate symptoms.

On Anxiety. The result of this study aligns with studies that indicate resilience as a factor in managing anxiety. Campbell Sills et al. (2006) showed a correlation between resilience and anxiety symptoms in young adults in the United States, implying that a higher level of resilience could lead to improved emotional control when faced with stressors that typically trigger anxiety. Similarly, Lee (2015) found that resilience significantly predicted levels of anxiety among adolescents in South Korea. This study contributes to this body of knowledge by identifying similar trends among college students suggesting that teaching resilience could be beneficial in academic settings where anxiety levels are high. Furthermore, Magno (2010) from the Philippines supports this result by showing the association between resilience and reduced anxiety among university students, advocating for the promotion of resilience to enhance mental well-being among students.

Stress. In terms of stress, the result of this study aligns with Smith and colleagues' study in 2008 which observed that American college

students displaying resilience tended to report lower stress levels. This implies that having resilience may provide individuals with strategies to handle academic and personal challenges effectively (Smith et al., 2008). A study conducted by Li et. al in China in 2015 also found that resilience could significantly reduce stress among students indicating that resilience offers a protective benefit irrespective of cultural background (Li et al., 2015). Additionally, Macasaets's (2018) research revealed that Filipino students with higher levels of resilience experienced less stress which corroborates with this present study's findings and highlights the significance of nurturing resilience to address stress within educational settings.

The study highlights resilience as not only an important psychological strength but also a potential focus for interventions to enhance mental health in academic settings. By promoting resilience and strengthening social support networks schools can greatly improve the well-being of their students leading to better academic and personal outcomes. This study emphasizes the importance of resilience and the need to incorporate resilience-building strategies into student assistance programs.

6. Role of Social Support

Having a social network is generally considered as an important factor in enhancing a person's ability to cope with mental health issues. Ozbay and colleagues (2007) showed that social connections play a role in improving resilience by activating neurobiological processes that help manage stress, leading to better recovery and adjustment during challenging times. Understanding the neurobiological perspective between emotional responses to social support is essential for recognizing its positive effects on mental well-being.

Cohen (2004) explained how social support plays a role in helping individuals deal with stress: Cohen;s work shows the psychological comfort that social support provides, reduces perceived threat of stress, and thus diminishes its potential negative

effects. By perceiving support as available and actually receiving it, people can better cope with stressors, and lessen their negative effects. Cohen then emphasizes the comforting aspect of support, which reduces the perceived threat of stress and mitigates its potentially harmful consequences.

Kawachi and Berkman (2001) provide an epidemiological perspective on the role of social support in promoting mental well-being. Their research indicates that strong social connections can lead to reduced mortality rates and improved mental health outcomes, indicating the impact of social relationships on psychological well-being.

In a research study about the resilience of adolescents, Rueger and colleagues (2010) showed that having friends is important for reducing emotional stress. Their results suggest that peers can help alleviate feelings of sadness and worry, highlighting how social connections can boost resilience.

Research conducted by Uchino in 2006 examines the complex ways in which social support impacts various aspects of health, such as cardiovascular well-being, immune system function, and mental health. According to Uchinos' (2006) findings, the strength and number of social relationships play a crucial role in influencing several physiological mechanisms essential for upholding mental well-being and resilience.

Implications

Practical Implications for Mental Health Interventions in Educational Settings Enhancing Resilience in Students

Students can build their resilience by participating in programs like the "Resilience Empowerment Program" (REP). This program could include training sessions on managing stress solving problems and thinking adaptively. These workshops can be part of the academic curriculum or course to help students improve their resilience skills. It is also important for teachers to recognize students who may need support, with resilience and offer appropriate help or guidance.

Strengthening Social Support Systems. To reinforce the social support within educational

settings it is suggested to create a "Peer Assistance Network" (PAN). This network would offer students a platform to connect, interact, and support each other through group gatherings and social activities thereby improving both emotional and practical assistance. Moreover, faculty training should include strategies for providing emotional and academic support. Programs like the "Family Academic Partnership" (FAP) could also promote family engagement in students' education thus expanding support networks, beyond the school environment.

Incorporating Mental Health Support into Education. Schools and colleges could include accessible mental health resources, like counseling centers on campus as part of their services. The introduction of the "Campus Mental Health Initiative" (CMHI) could provide a range of support services, including therapy sessions and mental health workshops designed to meet the needs of students. Moreover integrating health education into existing academic curricula could play a key role in breaking down stigma and fostering awareness about mental well-being. It is important to conduct mental health assessments to detect and address potential issues early on for students who may be at risk.

Recommendations for Educators

Training and Development. Teachers could receive training on recognizing and handling mental health concerns in school environments. This training should cover understanding personal differences, identification and management of mental health issues in academic settings, so educators can effectively support a diverse range of students. An "Educator Mental Health Literacy Program" (EMHLP) could aim to equip teachers with the skills and knowledge needed to foster a learning environment that acknowledges and addresses mental health concerns.

Curriculum Integration. Incorporating mental health topics into the curriculum can significantly increase awareness and understanding among students. Subjects like psychology, health, and social sciences could cover areas such as emotional intelligence and resilience enhancing students' ability to manage

stress and adversity. Assignments and projects which focus on developing these skills should be integrated with various courses to create a supportive educational environment to support mental well-being.

By implementing these suggested strategies and actions educational institutions can significantly improve the well-being and resilience of their students. These efforts not only aid in academic achievement but also play an important role in fostering students' overall well-being by equipping them to address a range of real-life problems beyond the classroom setting.

CONCLUSIONS

This study examines the role of resilience and social support in mitigating mental health challenges among college students. The results show that students with higher levels of resilience tend to experience fewer signs of depression, anxiety, and stress, underscoring the importance of resilience as a key protective factor. Moreover, the study indicates that social support significantly enhances the impacts of resilience. Students who feel well supported by their peers, family, and teachers tend to have more positive mental health outcomes. This shows the significance of having support networks, in educational settings.

Based on the results of this study, several implications for educational institutions are raised: It is recommended that educational institutions integrate resilience training programs like the "Resilience Empowerment Program" (REP) into their academic curriculum. This could students with coping strategies and stress management skills. Additionally setting up support systems such as a "Peer Support Network" (PSN) can provide students, with practical support strengthening their ability to navigate academic and personal challenges. Furthermore, campuses could provide mental health services, including counseling, coaching, and regular mental health checks to identify and address mental health concerns early on. These services could also work towards reducing the stigma associated with seeking health support. Lastly, educators need to receive training to effectively identify mental health issues and

foster a supportive and inclusive learning environment.

The proposed strategies advocate for addressing students' mental well-being by developing personal resilience with structured support to enhance mental health and academic outcomes. Implementing these recommendations can help schools create an atmosphere that cultivates resilient individuals capable of managing life challenges.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To improve the generalizability of research findings it is important future studies could widen their criteria for participants by including age group and individuals with varied educational backgrounds. This will ensure that the results accurately represent a student population included both students and those pursuing further education. Additionally, it is suggested to combine clinical evaluations with self-reported assessments like the Brief Resilience Scale (BRS) and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (DASS 21) to reduce response biases and offer a holistic analysis of the psychological aspects under examination. It is also recommended to use longitudinal study designs to address the limitations in cross sectional studies. By employing longitudinal designs researchers can track changes and potential causal links between resilience, social support and mental health outcomes over time providing insights into how these factors impact student mental health in the long term.

These approaches will collectively enhance the relevance and applicability of research within the mental health domain in educational settings.

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