

Stress among Youth: Psychological Well-Being and Perceived Social Support among Young Adults

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Abstract: Youth and early adulthood represent critical developmental windows marked by intense academic, occupational, and interpersonal transitions. This empirical study investigated the structural associations among perceived stress, psychological well-being, and perceived social support across dimensions of family, friends, and significant others. A sample of 184 young adults aged 18–25 years completed the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS10), the WHO-5 Well-Being Index, and the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS). Pearson correlation analyses revealed a robust negative association between perceived stress and psychological well-being ($r = -.52, p < .001$). Conversely, total perceived social support demonstrated a significant positive relationship with well-being ($r = .48, p < .001$) and an inverse relationship with stress ($r = -.39, p < .001$). Multiple regression analysis demonstrated that perceived stress and family social support were the strongest independent predictors of psychological well-being, accounting for 38.4% of total variance. These findings emphasize the imperative of integrated community and institutional support systems in mitigating youth stress and promoting mental resilience.

Keywords: Perceived Stress, Psychological Well-Being, Perceived Social Support, Young Adults, PSS-10, WHO-5, MSPSS

1. Introduction

Youth and early adulthood (typically defined between 18 and 25 years) constitute pivotal developmental periods characterized by profound psychological, structural, and social transitions. During this phase, individuals undergo identity exploration, pursue higher education or career launch, attempt to attain financial independence, and establish complex interpersonal networks. While these developmental tasks offer substantial potential for personal growth and autonomy, they simultaneously introduce pronounced psychosocial stressors that can overwhelm an individual's self-regulatory resources. Psychological stress emerges when environmental demands are appraised as exceeding an individual's adaptive capacity and coping resources. In contemporary youth populations, sources of stress are multifaceted, encompassing rigorous academic evaluations, career uncertainty, economic precariousness, social comparison, and changing family expectations. Unmitigated and chronic stress exposure during youth is strongly linked to affective dysregulation, cognitive impairment, somatic complaints, and reduced subjective well-being. Crucially, psychological well-being is recognized not merely as the absence of mental illness or distress, but as the presence of positive psychological functioning, emotional balance, personal growth, and self-acceptance. Understanding how young adults sustain psychological well-being amidst continuous environmental stressors is a paramount priority for contemporary health psychology and clinical practice. Perceived social support serves as a key protective resource against psychological vulnerability. Defined as the cognitive appraisal of available assistance from one's social network, social support encompasses emotional, informational, and tangible dimensions. Social support operates through two primary psychological mechanisms: direct health promotion (main-effect hypothesis) and stress mitigation during heightened crisis (buffering hypothesis). Evaluating whether

different sources of support- specifically family, peer networks, and significant others- exert differential protective effects on youth well-being provides vital empirical nuance for targeted interventions.

2. Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The theoretical framework for this study integrates Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping with Cohen and Wills' (1985) Stress-Buffering Hypothesis. The Transactional Model posits that stress is not an inherent property of environmental events, but rather an outcome of cognitive appraisal. Primary appraisal involves evaluating an event as threatening, harmful, or challenging, while secondary appraisal assesses available internal and external coping assets. Perceived social support acts as a primary external coping asset, altering secondary appraisals and mitigating physiological and psychological distress. Empirical literature consistently underscores the vulnerability of young adults to heightened stress. Cohen et al. (1983) established that elevated Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) scores correlate strongly with physical symptoms and reduced healthseeking behaviors. In assessing well-being, Bech et al. (2003) demonstrated that the WHO-5 Well-Being Index effectively captures positive mood, vitality, and general life satisfaction across diverse cultures. Studies employing Zimet et al.'s (1988) Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) further reveal that while peer support increases in salience during early adulthood, structural family support remains uniquely protective against depressive symptoms and affective burnout.

Research Hypotheses

H1: Perceived stress will exhibit a significant negative correlation with psychological well-being among young adults.

Volume 15 Issue 10, October 2026

Fully Refereed | Open Access | Double Blind Peer Reviewed Journal

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H2: Total perceived social support (and its domains: family, friends, significant others) will exhibit a significant positive correlation with psychological well-being.

H3: Perceived social support will be significantly negatively associated with perceived stress.

H4: Perceived stress and social support dimensions will significantly predict psychological well-being.

3. Aim and Objectives

The overarching aim of this study is to empirically examine the relationships between perceived stress, psychological well-being, and multidimensional perceived social support among young adults. To assess the baseline levels of perceived stress, well-being, and social support in a community sample of young adults. To evaluate bivariate associations between perceived stress, well-being, and distinct support sources. To examine the unique predictive

power of stress and specific support domains on overall well-being.

4. Methodology

4.1 Research Design and Participants

This study utilized a quantitative, cross-sectional, correlational survey design. A convenience sample of $N = 184$ young adults residing in urban educational and commercial hubs in Bengaluru, India, was recruited. Eligibility criteria included: (a) age between 18 and 25 years, (b) functional literacy in English, and (c) provision of informed consent. The sample comprised 98 females (53.3%) and 86 males (46.7%), with a mean age of $\$21.42$ years ($\$SD = 2.18$). Regarding primary status, 61.4% were undergraduate/postgraduate university students, 31.0% were employed young professionals, and 7.6% were seeking employment.

Table 1: Demographic Profile of Participant Sample (N = 184)

Demographic Variable	Category	Frequency (n)	Percentage (%)
Gender	Female	98	53.3%
	Male	86	46.7%
Occupational Status	University Student	113	61.4%
	Employed Professional	57	31.0%
	Seeking Employment	14	7.6%
Living Arrangement	With Family	102	55.4%
	Hostel / Independent Rental	82	44.6%

4.2 Measurement Instruments

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10): Developed by Cohen et al. (1983), this 10-item instrument measures the degree to which life situations over the past month are appraised as unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelming. Responses are recorded on a 5-point Likert scale (0 = Never to 4 = Very Often). Total scores range from 0 to 40, with higher scores indicating elevated stress. Cronbach's alpha in the current sample was $\alpha = .84$. WHO5 Well-Being Index: A 5-item self-report questionnaire assessing positive subjective wellbeing over the preceding two weeks (Bech et al., 2003). Items are scored on a 6-point scale (0 = At no time to 5 = All of the time). Raw scores are converted to a percentage scale (0–100), where higher scores denote superior psychological well-being. Cronbach's alpha was $\alpha = .86$. Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS): A 12-item inventory (Zimet et al., 1988) evaluating perceived support across three subscales: Family, Friends, and Significant Others. Items are scored on a 7-point Likert scale (1 = Very Strongly Disagree to 7 = Very Strongly Agree). In this study, subscale alphas were .87 (Family), .85 (Friends), and .89 (Significant Others), with total scale $\alpha = .91$.

4.3 Procedure and Ethical Considerations

Data were collected electronically via a secure digital survey platform between November 2025 and January 2026. Participant recruitment was conducted through university institutional channels and professional youth networks. Clear participant information was provided, emphasizing voluntary participation, absolute anonymity, and the right to withdraw

without penalty. Institutional ethical approval was obtained from the Departmental Ethics Committee, JAIN (Deemed-to-be University). Mental health helpline contacts were provided at the conclusion of the survey as a supportive safeguard.

5. Statistical Results

5.1 Descriptive Statistics

Prior to inferential analyses, data distributions were verified for normality. Skewness and kurtosis metrics for all standardized measures fell within the acceptable range of ± 1.0 . Table 2 presents the descriptive metrics across all study measures. 20.85 MEAN PSS-10 SCORE 54.20 MEAN WHO-5 INDEX 5.12 MEAN MSPSS SCORE

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics and Scale Reliabilities (N = 184)

Variable	Possible Range	Mean	SD	Skewness	Cronbach's α
Perceived Stress (PSS-10)	0 – 40	20.85	5.82	0.14	.84
Psychological Well-Being (WHO-5)	0 – 100	54.20	17.45	-0.22	.86
MSPSS Total Score	1 – 7	5.12	0.98	-0.31	.91
Family Support Subscale	1 – 7	5.28	1.18	0.42	.87
Friends Support Subscale	1 – 7	5.15	1.05	-0.28	.85
Significant Other Subscale	1 – 7	4.93	1.32	-0.19	.89

The sample exhibited moderate to high levels of perceived stress ($M = 20.85$, $SD = 5.82$), with over 58% of respondents falling into the moderate-to-high stress categories. Overall well-being averaged $\$54.20$ ($\$SD = 17.45$), reflecting moderate subjective quality of life.

5.2 Bivariate Correlation Analysis

To evaluate Hypotheses 1, 2, and 3, Pearson product-moment correlation coefficients were computed. As detailed in Table 3, all hypothesized relationships attained statistical significance at $p < .001$.

Table 3: Bivariate Correlation Matrix Across Variables

Variable 1 2 3 4 5
1. Perceived Stress (PSS-10) 1.00
2. Well-Being (WHO-5) $-.52^{***}$ 1.00
3. Total Social Support (MSPSS) $-.39^{***}$ $.48^{***}$ 1.00
4. Family Support $-.41^{***}$ $.51^{***}$ $.79^{***}$

1.00 5. Friends Support $-.28^{***}$ $.34^{***}$ $.81^{***}$ $.48^{***}$ 1.00
6. Significant Other Support $.26^{***}$ $.31^{***}$ $.76^{***}$ $.39^{***}$ $.52^{***}$ *** $p < .001$ (two-tailed test). Supporting H1, perceived stress showed a strong, statistically significant inverse correlation with psychological well-being ($r = -.52$, $p < .001$). Supporting H2, total perceived social support demonstrated a substantial positive correlation with well-being ($r = .48$, $p < .001$), with Family Support displaying the strongest individual subscale relationship ($r = .51$, $p < .001$). Supporting H3, social support correlated negatively with stress ($r = -.39$, $p < .001$).

5.3 Multiple Linear Regression Analysis

To test H4, a multiple linear regression analysis was conducted with Psychological Well-Being (WHO-5) as the criterion variable. Predictors included Perceived Stress (PSS-10) and the three distinct social support domains (Family, Friends, Significant Others).

Table 4: Multiple Regression Model Predicting Psychological Well-Being (N = 184)

Predictor Variable	Unstandardized B	SE B	Standardized β	t-value	p-value
(Intercept)	42.18				
Perceived Stress (PSS-10)	-1.18	0.18	-.40	-6.12	$< .001$
Family Support	1.45	1.08	.29	1.34	$< .001$
Friends Support	1.12	0.89	.18	1.26	$< .001$
Significant Other Support	1.26	.210	.12	6.00	$< .001$
Model Fit:	$R = .629$, $R^2 = .396$, Adjusted $R^2 = .384$, $F(4, 179) = 29.32$, $p < .001$.				

The total regression model was statistically significant ($F(4, 179) = 29.32$, $p < .001$), accounting for 38.4% of the adjusted variance in psychological well-being ($R^2 = .396$, Adj. $R^2 = .384$). Perceived stress emerged as the single largest negative predictor ($\beta = -.40$, $p < .001$). Among support sources, Family Support was the only subscale maintaining a statistically significant unique contribution ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). Friends and Significant Other support were non-significant in the multi-variable model, likely due to shared variance with family support.

6. Discussion

The primary aim of this investigation was to evaluate the empirical relationships among perceived stress, psychological well-being, and social support in young adults. The findings provide unambiguous empirical confirmation for all proposed hypotheses, reinforcing theoretical models of stress and resilience in developmental psychology. The strong inverse correlation between perceived stress and psychological well-being

($r = -.52$) aligns with Lazarus and Folkman's transactional framework. When young adults perceive life events as unpredictable or overwhelming, their affective vitality and psychological functioning decline precipitously. In urban contexts such as Bengaluru, young adults face compounding pressures, including demanding academic schedules, fierce labor market competition, and identity consolidation. High stress depletes cognitive and emotional bandwidth, inhibiting engagement in self-actualizing activities. A critical contribution of this study lies in highlighting the primary protective role of Family Support over peer networks. While peer relationships expand significantly during youth, the regression findings demonstrate that family support exerts a powerful independent effect on psychological well-being ($\beta = .29$, $p < .001$). Family networks often provide foundational emotional safety, long-term financial security, and unconditional acceptance, which buffer young adults against external socio-economic anxieties. Peer support, while valuable for socialization, may carry reciprocal interpersonal demands that diminish its net buffering capacity during acute stress periods. These empirical insights strongly validate the Stress-Buffering Hypothesis (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Perceived social support alters the secondary cognitive appraisal phase, instilling confidence that resources are accessible to navigate environmental stressors. Consequently, social support acts both directly by elevating positive affect and indirectly by attenuating perceived stress levels.

7. Implications and Applications

The findings have direct implications for clinical practice, higher education administration, and community health planning: University Counseling Services: Higher education institutions should design stress-reduction workshops incorporating Cognitive Behavioral Therapy (CBT) and Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) to alter maladaptive cognitive stress appraisals. Family-Inclusive Interventions: Counselors and youth practitioners should avoid viewing young adults in isolation. Engaging family units to foster emotionally supportive, low-conflict home environments can yield substantial psychological benefits. Peer Mentorship Systems: Programs should structure peer support around structured problem-solving and institutional navigation, elevating peer interactions from passive socialization to tangible instrumental support.

8. Limitations and Future Research

Several methodological limitations should be acknowledged when interpreting these findings: 1. Cross-Sectional Architecture: The correlational design precludes causal inferences. While stress is modeled as predicting well-being, reciprocal causation is plausible. Future studies should utilize longitudinal designs. 2. Sampling Constraints: Participants were drawn from an urban center via convenience sampling. Generalizability to rural youth or non-formal sector workers remains limited. 3. Self-Report Reliance: Reliance on self-report instruments introduces potential common-method bias and social desirability effects. Future research should incorporate physiological markers of stress (e.g., cortisol levels).

9. Conclusion

This empirical study highlights the crucial interplay between perceived stress, social support, and psychological well-being among young adults. Stress remains a major risk factor for psychological distress during early adulthood. However, strong perceived social support—particularly from family systems—serves as a vital psychological buffer. Institutional strategies aimed at elevating youth well-being must combine individual stress-management skills with structural support systems.

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