



## Assessing Stress Levels and Coping Mechanisms among Vocational and Technical College Students: A Case of XXX College, China

Juhua Wan

Graduate School, University of Perpetual Help System Dalta, Las Piñas City, 1740, Philippines.

Email: 27302564@qq.com

**Abstract:** Stress is a prevalent issue among college students, exacerbated by academic demands, workload, time pressure, and future career concerns. Vocational and technical college students face additional stressors related to specialized programs, including technical skills training and industry expectations. This study focuses on stress levels and coping mechanisms among students at the XXX College in Guangdong, China, using a qualitative approach. In-depth interviews were conducted with 35 participants, revealing academic pressure, financial concerns, and personal/social challenges as significant stressors. Coping mechanisms included seeking social support, engaging in recreational activities, practicing mindfulness, and seeking professional help. The findings underscore the importance of targeted interventions and support systems to enhance student well-being and academic success in vocational and technical education.

**Keywords:** Stress, coping mechanisms, vocational and technical college students, qualitative research.

### I. Introduction

Stress is a common experience among college students, with academic demands, workload, time pressure, and future career concerns often contributing to elevated stress levels.<sup>[1]</sup> Moreover, vocational and technical college students face unique stressors associated with their specialized programs, such as technical skills training, practical assignments, industry expectations, and the need to balance academic requirements with professional aspirations. In recent years, vocational and technical colleges have gained significant importance in preparing students for specific careers and addressing the growing demand for skilled professionals.<sup>[2]</sup> While these institutions provide specialized training and education, the college experience can be accompanied by various stressors that impact students' well-being and academic performance. Understanding stress levels and coping mechanisms among vocational and technical college students is crucial for developing effective support systems and interventions to promote their mental health and success.

One such institution is the XXX College, Guangdong China. As the only public vocational and technical college in Shaoguan City, the college holds a prominent position in the region. It has been recognized as a key national technical school, a demonstration school for the reform and development of secondary vocational education, and a national-level training base for highly skilled personnel. The XXX College is situated on a sprawling campus spanning 521 acres, with a total building area of 128,000 square meters. The college currently enrolls approximately 8,090 students and employs 465 faculty and staff members.

While vocational and technical colleges like the XXX College provide specialized education and training, students in these institutions face unique stressors associated with their programs. These stressors may include the demands of technical skills training, practical assignments, industry expectations, and the need to balance academic requirements with professional aspirations. The impact of stress on students' physical and mental health, as well as their academic performance, cannot be overlooked. High levels of stress can lead to burnout, anxiety, depression, decreased motivation, and impaired cognitive functioning. It is, therefore, crucial to explore the factors



contributing to stress and identify coping mechanisms employed by vocational and technical college students to manage and mitigate stress-related challenges.

Coping mechanisms refer to the strategies individuals employ to deal with stressful situations and their associated emotions. Effective coping mechanisms can promote resilience, well-being, and academic success among students. However, the coping strategies adopted by vocational and technical college students may differ from those of students in traditional academic settings due to the unique demands and characteristics of vocational and technical education. Understanding these coping mechanisms can inform the development of targeted interventions and support services tailored to the specific needs of vocational and technical college students.

This study aims to fill this gap by assessing stress levels and coping mechanisms among students at the XXX College, China. By adopting a qualitative approach, this research seeks to capture the nuanced experiences, perceptions, and emotions of students, providing a comprehensive understanding of the stressors they encounter and the coping strategies they employ. The findings of this study will contribute to the existing body of knowledge on stress and coping among vocational and technical college students, informing educational institutions, policymakers, and mental health practitioners about the specific challenges faced by these students. Ultimately, this research aims to facilitate the development of targeted interventions and support systems that enhance students' well-being, academic performance, and overall success in vocational and technical education.

## II. Literature Review

Stress is a prevalent concern among college students, impacting various aspects of their academic performance, mental health, and overall well-being. In recent years, researchers have conducted numerous studies to explore stress levels and coping mechanisms among this population, shedding light on the multifaceted nature of stressors and their implications for student outcomes. This literature review synthesizes findings from relevant studies to provide insights into the factors contributing to stress among vocational and technical college students, as well as the coping strategies employed to manage stress effectively.

### 2.1 Stressors Among College Students

Boyratz et al.<sup>[3]</sup> investigated the relationship between posttraumatic stress and academic achievement among first-year college students, highlighting the mediating roles of avoidance coping and external academic locus of control. Tam et al.<sup>[4]</sup> explored the mediating effects of resilience and psychiatric symptoms in the relationship between perceived stress and non-medical use of prescription drugs among college students. Lane<sup>[5]</sup> focused on the impact of peer mentoring on stress and adjustment during the first year of college, emphasizing its potential as a critical strategy for supporting student retention and success.

### 2.2 Coping Mechanisms and Resilience

In response to stress, college students employ various coping mechanisms to manage their emotional and psychological well-being. Wang et al.<sup>[6]</sup> conducted a literature review on the determinants of sleep quality in college students, highlighting the importance of sleep hygiene and stress management practices. Jensen et al. examined the relationships among self-reported stress, anxiety, and depression; engineering identity; and perceptions of inclusion among undergraduate engineering students, emphasizing the need for supportive campus environments and resources.<sup>[7]</sup>

### 2.3 Effects of COVID-19 Pandemic

The COVID-19 pandemic has introduced unprecedented challenges for college students, exacerbating stress and mental health concerns. Shrestha et al.<sup>[8]</sup> investigated gaming disorder among medical college students during the pandemic lockdown, highlighting the impact of prolonged isolation and disruption of daily routines on students' well-being. Lee et al.<sup>[9]</sup> described stress, anxiety, and depression symptoms among undergraduate students during the early phase of the pandemic, emphasizing the importance of mental health services and support networks.

### 2.4 Implications for Practice and Policy

Understanding the complex interplay between stressors and coping mechanisms among vocational and technical college students has important implications for practice and policy. Amanvermez et al. [10] conducted a systematic review and meta-analysis on the effects of self-guided stress management interventions, highlighting the potential benefits of accessible and personalized support for student well-being. Godbolt et al. [11] explored the negative health effects of stereotypes and stress among Black female college students, underscoring the importance of culturally sensitive interventions and holistic approaches to mental health support.

### **III. Methodology**

#### **3.1 Qualitative Research Design**

The study employs a qualitative research design to explore stress levels and coping mechanisms among vocational and technical college students at the XXX College. 35 participants are invited for the interviews. Qualitative research allows for an in-depth understanding of individuals' experiences, perspectives, and behaviors in their natural settings. In-depth interviews were chosen as the primary method of data collection due to their ability to elicit detailed, nuanced responses from participants. It allows researchers to explore participants' subjective experiences, perceptions, and coping mechanisms related to stress in greater depth than other data collection methods. The interviews facilitate rapport building between researchers and participants, fostering open and honest communication essential for capturing authentic insights.

#### **3.2 Participant Selection Criteria and Recruitment Process**

A number of 35 participants were selected using purposive sampling to ensure representation across diverse demographic characteristics, academic backgrounds, and levels of stress. Inclusion criteria encompassed vocational and technical college students enrolled at the XXX College who self-identified as experiencing stress. Recruitment involved reaching out to potential participants through institutional channels, such as student associations and academic departments, and inviting voluntary participation in the study.

The selection of 35 participants for this study was meticulously designed to ensure a comprehensive exploration of stress levels and coping mechanisms among vocational and technical college students. Employing purposive sampling, the study aimed to achieve representation across diverse demographic characteristics, academic backgrounds, and stress levels, thereby facilitating a nuanced understanding of participants' experiences.

#### **3.3 Data Collection Procedures**

In-depth interviews were conducted with a total of 35 participants, following a semi-structured interview guide developed based on relevant literature and research objectives. Each interview session lasted approximately 45 to 60 minutes and was audio-recorded with participants' consent. During the interviews, participants were encouraged to express their experiences, perceptions, and coping strategies concerning stress openly. Probing questions were used to delve deeper into emerging themes and insights.

#### **3.4 Ethical Considerations and Measures**

Ethical considerations were paramount throughout the research process to ensure the protection of participants' rights, confidentiality, and privacy. The study obtained ethical approval from the relevant institutional review board prior to data collection. Informed consent was obtained from all participants, clarifying the purpose of the study, confidentiality measures, and their voluntary participation rights. Participants were assured of anonymity, and all identifiable information was kept confidential through coding and secure data storage practices. Additionally, participants were informed of their right to withdraw from the study at any point without repercussions.

### **IV. Results and Findings**

#### **4.1 Description of the Sample Characteristics**

The sample population comprised both male and female students, reflecting gender diversity within the college. Participants were selected based on their self-identification as experiencing stress, ensuring representation across different stress levels and coping mechanisms. The sample included students from different academic years of 2021-2023, ranging from freshmen to senior students, offering a comprehensive perspective on stress experiences throughout the college years. Participants hailed from diverse socio-economic backgrounds, reflecting the heterogeneous nature of the student body at the college. The age range of participants varied, reflecting the typical age distribution of college students pursuing vocational and technical education.

#### 4.2 Key Themes and Findings

Through thematic analysis, several key themes and findings emerged, providing valuable insights into the experiences of the participants. Below is a summary of the key themes and findings:

**Academic Pressure and Workload:** Participants frequently cited academic pressure and workload as significant sources of stress. The demands of coursework, assignments, and exams were identified as primary stressors. Many students expressed feeling overwhelmed by the volume of academic responsibilities, leading to heightened stress levels and feelings of anxiety. "The workload here is immense. We have multiple assignments due every week, and it's challenging to keep up with everything.", 25 participants replied.

**Financial Concerns:** Financial concerns emerged as another prominent stressor among participants. Many students reported experiencing stress related to tuition fees, living expenses, and the financial burden of pursuing higher education. "Tuition fees are a big burden for me. I worry about how I'll manage to pay for my education and cover my living expenses.", as stated by the participants.

Some participants described juggling part-time jobs with their studies to alleviate financial stress, highlighting the challenges faced by students from economically disadvantaged backgrounds.

**Personal and Social Challenges:** Participants shared experiences of personal and social challenges, including difficulties adjusting to college life, conflicts with peers or roommates, and feelings of homesickness. Social isolation and a lack of social support were identified as contributing factors to stress, particularly among students who were away from their families and support networks. "Being away from home and family is tough. I miss them, and sometimes it feels lonely here." "There's pressure to fit in and make friends, but it's not always easy. I've had conflicts with roommates, which adds to my stress." have been mentioned by over 20 participants.

**Coping Mechanisms:** Despite facing various stressors, participants employed a range of coping mechanisms to manage stress and maintain well-being. Seeking social support from friends, family, and peers emerged as a primary coping strategy. Participants emphasized the importance of having a support system to share their concerns and seek advice.

Engaging in recreational activities, such as sports, hobbies, and artistic pursuits, was another common coping mechanism reported by participants. These activities provided a source of relaxation and distraction from academic stressors. Some participants mentioned practicing mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques as effective ways to alleviate stress and promote mental well-being. "Talking to my friends and sharing my feelings helps me feel better. It's comforting to know that I'm not alone." "I find solace in art. When I paint or draw, it's like a form of therapy for me. It helps me relax and escape from my worries."

Seeking professional help from counselors or mental health professionals was also mentioned as a coping strategy, particularly for students experiencing significant psychological distress.

**Resilience and Adaptation:** Despite facing multiple stressors, many participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability in managing their stress levels. Students described developing strategies to prioritize tasks, set realistic goals, and maintain a positive outlook even in challenging circumstances. Some participants emphasized the importance of self-care practices, such as adequate sleep, healthy eating, and regular exercise, in promoting resilience and coping with stress.

**Recommendations for Support:** Participants expressed a need for greater institutional support and resources to address mental health and well-being concerns among students, as some participants

suggest “We need more counseling services and mental health support on campus. Sometimes, it feels like there's nowhere to turn for help”

Suggestions included increasing access to counseling services, providing financial assistance or scholarships for students in need, and creating more opportunities for social interaction and peer support on campus.

## **V. Discussion**

The sample comprised a diverse group of students, representing various genders, academic years, and socio-economic backgrounds. Through thematic analysis, several key themes emerged, offering valuable insights into the experiences of the participants.

One of the prominent stressors identified by participants was academic pressure and workload. The demands of coursework, assignments, and exams were consistently mentioned as significant stressors. This finding aligns with previous research on college students, highlighting the pervasive nature of academic stress. The participants expressed feeling overwhelmed by the volume of academic responsibilities, which underscores the need for strategies to help students manage their workload effectively. The college could consider implementing time management workshops or academic support programs to assist students in developing skills to cope with academic stress.

Financial concerns emerged as another major stressor among the participants. Tuition fees, living expenses, and the financial burden of pursuing higher education were identified as sources of stress. This finding highlights the importance of addressing financial challenges faced by vocational and technical college students. The college administration should explore opportunities to provide financial assistance, such as scholarships or work-study programs, to alleviate the financial burden on students. Additionally, financial literacy programs and resources can empower students to make informed decisions and manage their finances more effectively.

Personal and social challenges were also identified as sources of stress among participants. Difficulties adjusting to college life, conflicts with peers or roommates, and feelings of homesickness were common experiences shared by the students. These findings emphasize the need for comprehensive support systems that address the social and emotional well-being of vocational and technical college students. The college could establish mentorship programs, peer support groups, or orientation activities to facilitate social integration and provide a sense of community for students. Additionally, counseling services should be readily accessible to help students navigate personal challenges and develop effective coping strategies.

Regarding coping mechanisms, seeking social support emerged as a primary strategy employed by participants. Having a support system of friends, family, and peers was deemed invaluable in managing stress. The college could encourage the formation of student support networks, facilitate social events, and promote a sense of belonging within the campus community. Furthermore, providing training or workshops on effective communication and conflict resolution skills can equip students with the tools to navigate interpersonal challenges.

Engaging in recreational activities, such as sports, hobbies, and artistic pursuits, was another commonly reported coping mechanism among participants. These activities provided a much-needed outlet for relaxation and distraction from academic stressors. The college should consider promoting extracurricular activities and creating spaces where students can pursue their diverse interests. Providing resources and facilities for sports, arts, and other recreational activities can contribute to a well-rounded college experience and help students manage stress effectively. Participants also mentioned the utilization of mindfulness, meditation, or relaxation techniques as effective coping strategies. This highlights the potential benefits of incorporating mindfulness practices into the college curriculum or offering workshops on stress management and self-care.

The findings also revealed the importance of professional help in coping with significant psychological distress. Participants mentioned the need for accessible counseling services and mental health support on campus. To address this, the college should prioritize the provision of mental health

resources, including trained counselors or psychologists, to offer support to students in need. Creating awareness campaigns about mental health and reducing the stigma associated with seeking professional help can also encourage students to utilize these resources.

Despite the challenges and stressors faced by vocational and technical college students, the study identified resilience and adaptability as important characteristics. Many participants demonstrated the ability to prioritize tasks, set realistic goals, and maintain a positive outlook. The college can nurture resilience by promoting self-care practices and providing resources on stress management and personal development. Encouraging students to practice self-care through adequate sleep, healthy eating, regular exercise, and promoting a balanced lifestyle can contribute to their overall well-being.

## **VI. Implication of the Findings**

6.1 Practical Implications: Institutions can leverage to enhance support services tailored to the unique needs of vocational and technical college students. By understanding the diverse array of stressors encountered by students, educational institutions can develop targeted interventions aimed at mitigating stress and fostering overall well-being. Moreover, the identification of coping mechanisms employed by students presents an opportunity for institutions to promote resilience and mental health within the student population.

6.2 Policy Implications: Policymakers within the education sector have a pivotal role in advocating for increased funding and resources allocated towards mental health support services on college campuses. This study emphasizes the necessity of integrating mental health and well-being initiatives into the broader framework of educational policy. Additionally, policymakers can draw from participants' recommendations regarding institutional support to inform decisions aimed at fortifying student support systems and cultivating an environment conducive to learning.

6.3 Institutional Implications: Colleges and universities can implement practical strategies based on the study's findings to address student stress levels effectively. This may include revising curriculum structures, providing comprehensive academic support services, and fostering a culture that prioritizes work-life balance. Moreover, institutions should prioritize the allocation of financial assistance and resources to alleviate the financial strain experienced by students, thus ensuring equitable access to education. Efforts to create a supportive campus environment that fosters social connectedness, peer support, and access to counseling services are paramount in promoting student well-being.

6.4 Future Research Directions: The implications drawn from this study also point towards promising avenues for future research. Researchers may explore the efficacy of specific interventions or programs designed to address student stress and enhance resilience. Longitudinal studies tracking students' stress levels and coping mechanisms over time could provide valuable insights into the evolving nature of student well-being. Furthermore, comparative studies examining variations in stress and coping experiences across different types of technical and vocational colleges, as well as cultural contexts, could deepen our understanding of the complex interplay between stress and educational environments.

## **VII. Conclusion**

The study explores the stress levels and coping mechanisms among vocational and technical college students, with a specific focus on the XXX College in Guangdong, China. The findings underscore the multifaceted nature of stress experienced by students, encompassing academic pressure, financial concerns, and personal/social challenges. Despite facing various stressors, participants demonstrated resilience and adaptability in managing their stress levels, employing coping strategies such as seeking social support, engaging in recreational activities, practicing mindfulness, and seeking professional help. For educational institutions like the XXX College, the findings underscore the importance of developing targeted interventions and support services to address student stress effectively. Strategies may include revising curriculum structures, providing comprehensive academic support services, and fostering a supportive campus environment that promotes social connectedness

and access to counseling services. Policymakers are urged to advocate for increased funding and resources allocated towards mental health support services on college campuses and integrate mental health initiatives into educational policy frameworks. Furthermore, future research directions are outlined, suggesting opportunities to explore the efficacy of specific interventions, track students' stress levels longitudinally, and examine variations in stress and coping experiences across different educational contexts and cultural settings.

## References

---

- [1] Lin Zhou; Laura J Jilderda; Floris Fojier; "Exploiting Aneuploidy-imposed Stresses and Coping Mechanisms to Battle Cancer", *OPEN BIOLOGY*, 2020. (IF: 3)
- [2] Xima Yang; Yongyong Xu; Ruyue Tan; Xiao Zhou; "Event Centrality and Post-traumatic Stress Symptoms Among College Students During The COVID-19 Pandemic: The Roles of Attention to Negative Information, Catastrophizing, and Rumination", *EUROPEAN JOURNAL OF PSYCHOTRAUMATOLOGY*, 2022.
- [3] Güler Boyraz; Yixun Zhu; J Brandon Waits; "Avoidance Coping And Academic Locus Of Control As Mediators Of The Relationship Between Posttraumatic Stress And Academic Achievement Among First-year College Students", *ANXIETY, STRESS, AND COPING*, 2019. (IF: 3)
- [4] Cheuk Chi Tam; Eric G Benotsch; Traci L Weinstein; "Resilience and Psychiatric Symptoms As Mediators Between Perceived Stress and Non-medical Use of Prescription Drugs Among College Students", *THE AMERICAN JOURNAL OF DRUG AND ALCOHOL ABUSE*, 2019. (IF: 3)
- [5] Stephanie R. Lane; "Addressing The Stressful First Year in College: Could Peer Mentoring Be A Critical Strategy?", *JOURNAL OF COLLEGE STUDENT RETENTION: RESEARCH, THEORY & ...*, 2020. (IF: 3)
- [6] Feifei Wang; Éva Bíró; "Determinants of Sleep Quality in College Students: A Literature Review", *EXPLORE (NEW YORK, N.Y.)*, 2020. (IF: 3)
- [7] Karin J. Jensen; Kelly J. Cross; "Engineering Stress Culture: Relationships Among Mental Health, Engineering Identity, and Sense of Inclusion", *JOURNAL OF ENGINEERING EDUCATION*, 2021. (IF: 3)
- [8] M V Shrestha; N Shrestha; S C Sharma; S K Joshi; "Gaming Disorder Among Medical College Students During COVID-19 Pandemic Lockdown", *KATHMANDU UNIVERSITY MEDICAL JOURNAL (KUMJ)*, 2021. (IF: 3)
- [9] Jungmin Lee; Hyun Ju Jeong; Sujin Kim; "Stress, Anxiety, and Depression Among Undergraduate Students During The COVID-19 Pandemic and Their Use of Mental Health Services", *INNOVATIVE HIGHER EDUCATION*, 2021. (IF: 4)
- [10] Yagmur Amanvermez; Ruiying Zhao; Pim Cuijpers; Leonore M de Wit; David D Ebert; Ronald C Kessler; Ronny Bruffaerts; Eirini Karyotaki; "Effects of Self-guided Stress Management Interventions in College Students: A Systematic Review and Meta-analysis", *INTERNET INTERVENTIONS*, 2022. (IF: 3)
- [11] Dawn Godbolt; Ijeoma Opara; Ndidiamaka Amutah-Onukagha; "Strong Black Women: Linking Stereotypes, Stress, and Overeating Among A Sample of Black Female College Students", *JOURNAL OF BLACK STUDIES*, 2022.