

Understanding Lifestyle Behaviour and Stress Among College Students: Through Literature Reviews

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Article Info	ABSTRACT
Article History: Received: 15th Dec 2025 Accepted: 18th Dec 2025 Published: 20th Oct 2025 Keywords: Lifestyle Behaviour Stress, College Students,	Today's youth is the empowerment of tomorrow's Nation. The present paper is an attempt to review existing theoretical, empirical and cross-cultural studies. The relationship between lifestyle behaviour and stress among emerging adults has become a subject of study. This paper synthesises existing research on Lifestyle behaviour and stress to explore the relationship between lifestyle behaviour and stress. In the world of rapid globalisation, changing social norms, increasing academic and social responsibilities, nuclear family patterns, and individualism, college students are experiencing greater stress. Consistent results across various studies indicate that inadequate sleep and poor nutrition, lack of physical activity, poor time management, substance abuse, internet addiction, changed family dynamics, limited social support, and global demands strongly predict higher stress among emerging adults. The present research will become an effective tool for early screening and detection of such cases to prevent the crisis. It also aims to minimise potential crises and to develop tailor-made programs for the upcoming society.

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How to Cite: Malve, C. H. (2025). Understanding lifestyle behaviour and stress among college students: Through literature reviews. IIP: World Journal of Humanities and Social Sciences (IIPWJHSS), 1(IV), 01-08.

Introduction

Today's Youth is the empowerment of tomorrow's nation. In today's changing era, in the world of globalisation, increasing social demands and changes in social norms are escalating a lot of stress among emerging adults, which results in various psychological problems such as loneliness, anxiety, depression, etc. The present century, that is the twenty-first century, is known as the "age of anxiety, conflict and stress" (Subbarao, 2017). According to the ICICI Lombard survey, Gen Z and millennial Indians are more vulnerable to stress than the older generation. Younger Indians, particularly from the Gen Z cohort, were more likely to be affected by stress, anxiety, and chronic illnesses. (Deutsche Welle, 2024) Stress depends on how people perceive a situation. Statistical analysis and cultural diversities also proved that Lifestyle and stress have become a subject of concern.

College student stress is widespread globally and in India, with studies showing **60%+ feeling stressed daily**, high rates of **anxiety (up to 70%)**, and significant moderate-to-severe depression, especially with high academic pressure; Indian data points to **44-68% experiencing stress**, often linked to grades, future, and finances, with females and urban students sometimes reporting higher levels, but overall numbers vary by study focus (e.g., medical vs. general).

Objectives: -

- 1) To study the Lifestyle behaviour among college students.
- 2) To observe the level of stress among college students.
- 3) To examine the relationship between Lifestyle behaviour and stress among college-going students through reviews of the literature.

Research Question: -

- 1) What are the effects of lifestyle and Stress on college students?
- 2) What is the relationship between Lifestyle behaviour and stress among emerging adults?

Methodology:

The present study is based on existing literature reviews on Lifestyle behaviour and stress, as well as underlying interrelated variables such as quality of sleep, diet pattern, physical activity, social adjustment, screen time, time management, and stress-related factors, such as self-esteem, well-being, and gender, which were collected from online and offline resources.

Online databases included ResearchGate, Springer, Frontiers, Sage Journals, PubMed, Indian Journal of Psychology, etc. Peer-reviewed articles and research papers published in reputable journals were systematically selected.

1.1 Lifestyle Behaviour

Lifestyle behaviour is a significant determinant of stress and well-being. Lifestyle behaviour includes sleep, Nutrition, physical exercise, substance use, screen time, time management, etc. Numerous studies have demonstrated that Lifestyle behaviour is an important matter of concern.

1.2 Stress

Stress is the body's response to any demand or change that requires adjustment. It depends on an individual's perception. If the situation is perceived as a challenge, it may lead to eustress or positive stress;

however, if the situation is perceived as a threatening one, it results in distress, which triggers changes in a person's motivation, cognition and physical functioning. Physiologically, it affects the autonomic nervous system by causing changes in the hypothalamus-pituitary-adrenal axis, which releases the stress hormone cortisol, as well as affecting neurotransmitter dopamine.

Bersia et al. (2024) conducted a study on "Well-being among university students in the post-COVID-19 era: a cross-country survey," which proposed that University students face numerous developmental and academic challenges that can affect their well-being and mental health, due to sociocultural factors across different countries. In a cross-sectional, multi-centre survey conducted from May to November 2023, Bersia and colleagues assessed students from universities in Italy, Spain, and Portugal to examine demographic characteristics, socioeconomic status, social support, academic environment, mental health, and perceived impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. The sample was predominantly female and heterosexual, with bisexuality as the next most common orientation (Bersia et al., 2024). Findings revealed notable cross-country differences: Italian students reported the lowest levels of mental well-being and the highest rates of anxiety, depression, and suicidal risk, despite similar levels of social support across the three countries. Spanish students demonstrated the highest confidence in their professional future compared with those in Italy and Portugal (Bersia et al., 2024). Overall, the study highlights significant mental health challenges facing university students in the post-COVID-19 era. (Bersia et al., 2024).

1.3 Lifestyle Behaviour of students:

Deasy et al. (2015) examined 'Psychological distress and lifestyle of students: implications for health promotion'. The research was conducted on lifestyle behaviours, psychological distress, and coping strategies among 1,557 nursing, midwifery, and teacher-education students. The results revealed that risky health behaviours were widespread most notably alcohol use (93.2%), along with unhealthy diet, physical inactivity, smoking, and cannabis use. High psychological distress affected 41.9% of students. The final results are based on a cluster of two groups. One group is characterized by multiple risk behaviours and the other by healthier habits. Students in the risk-behaviour group reported significantly higher psychological distress and relied more on passive, maladaptive coping strategies such as escape-avoidance. Final conclusion highlights the serious concerns for student well-being, academic performance, and the future roles of these students as health educators. It also strengthened the need for comprehensive health promotion efforts targeting multiple behaviours and stress management.

1.4 Stress and Health Habits:

Fogle, G. E., & Pettijohn, T. F. (2013). Research on 'Stress and health habits in college students' demonstrated that college students experience stress from various sources, such as poor self-care habits, educational demands, daily hassles, and perceived control over situations. In a study of 135 college freshmen, researchers examined relationships among perceived stress, health habits, daily hassles, and daily uplifts. Findings strongly supported the hypothesis that students with lower perceived stress demonstrated healthier self-care habits and experienced significantly fewer daily hassles and more daily uplifts than those with higher stress levels. However, perceived stress was not associated with differences in grade point average, minor medical issues, or gender. These results suggest that promoting reductions in perceived stress may benefit college freshmen by improving their health behaviours and overall adjustment to university life.

Horaist & Watson (2024) investigated 'Healthy lifestyle behaviours among first-year college students attending a university in Mississippi,' suggesting that college students face a higher risk of unhealthy lifestyle behaviours. In a descriptive quantitative study of first-year students at a university in southern Mississippi, lifestyle and health behaviours were assessed using the FANTASTIC Lifestyle Checklist. Results showed that only 19% of students regularly consumed a balanced diet, and more than half engaged in physical activity fewer than two times per week, although 91% perceived themselves as maintaining a healthy lifestyle. Additionally, 79% reported sadness or depression, and the overall FANTASTIC score demonstrated a significant correlation with gender.

1.5 Resilience and social support:

Litwic-Kamińska et al. (2023) examined "Resilience, positivity and social support as perceived stress predictors among university students" and proposed that Gender and nationality have a significant influence on stress; however, nationality did not significantly predict stress in the final model, highlighting the universality of these protective factors across cultural contexts. A general linear model revealed that resilience, positivity, tangible support, and gender were the strongest predictors of perceived stress. These results highlight the importance of enhancing personal strengths and support networks to improve students' mental health and inform prevention-focused educational interventions.

Long, L. D. (2025). Study focused on 'Healthy habits, healthy minds: An exploration of lifestyle behaviours and mental health among college students. The present study is focused on the relationship between lifestyle behaviours and anxiety and depression among college students. Results indicate that 38.2% of students screened positive for anxiety, and 44.2% for depression. Sleep was the strongest behavioural correlate. Physical activity acts as a protective factor, while e-cigarette and cannabis use show a high risk. Other variables, Loneliness, belonging, and financial stress, were strong indicators of poor mental health. Lifestyle and contextual factors play an important role in shaping student mental health, underscoring the value of holistic approaches in research and care.

1.6 Self-efficacy

Madson et al. (2022) examined a large and diverse group of college students (N = 693, ages 18–29) and observed how self-efficacy relates to various aspects of personal adjustment, academic satisfaction, depressive symptoms, physical health, and loneliness, both directly and indirectly through perceived stress. The researchers also examined whether these relationships differed by sex, ethnicity, school year, or first-generation college status. Using the PROCESS model, they found that higher self-efficacy was linked with better adjustment, partly because it was associated with lower stress. Women showed stronger links between self-efficacy and stress, as well as stress and depression. School year students' analysis showed that stress was not related to academic satisfaction among fourth-year students, but it was for all others. First-generation students exhibited a stronger negative correlation between self-efficacy and stress, and for them, higher self-efficacy was associated with greater academic satisfaction, unlike their peers.

1.7 Gender:

Matud, M. P., Díaz, A., Bethencourt, J. M., & Ibáñez, I. (2020). Conducted a study on "Gender differences in Distress". As emerging adulthood represents a crucial period characterised by major transitions in living situations, relationships, education, and employment, all of the above factors contribute to heightened stress and psychological distress. The researcher examined the influence of stress, coping styles, self-

esteem, and perceived social support on psychological outcomes. The results revealed that women reported higher levels of psychological distress, chronic stress, daily hassles, emotional coping, and perceived social support, while men scored higher in rational and detached coping styles and in self-esteem. Psychological distress in both genders was predicted by greater use of emotional coping, lower self-esteem, a higher number of life events, and lower social support. Another predictor of psychological distress in men was a less detached coping style, whereas in women, high chronic stress is a significant cause of psychological distress.

Masoom, M. (2022) examined the impact of sense of control on perceived stress among 609 emerging adults in Dhaka, while considering the potential mediating roles of religiosity and materialism. Using a 48-item structured questionnaire and structural equation modelling, the study found that a stronger sense of control significantly reduced perceived stress. However, neither religiosity nor materialism mediated this relationship. The findings support the transactional model of stress and coping and highlight the critical role of personal control in managing stress during emerging adulthood.

1.8 Optimism:

Mohsin et al. (2023) found that self-efficacy, optimism, and social support were significant positive predictors of health behaviours in young adults. This study examined how self-efficacy, optimism, and social support influence health behaviours among 397 young adults from universities in Lahore, Pakistan. Using a correlational design, the researchers found that all three psychological variables were positively related to and significant predictors of health-promoting behaviours. Gender differences showed that women scored higher on self-efficacy, optimism, and health behaviours, while men reported slightly higher social support, though not significantly. Overall, the study highlights the importance of strengthening psychological resources such as confidence and optimism to encourage healthier lifestyle choices in young adults.

Patel, P.J. (2017). research on 'Exploring the effect of emerging adults' perceived stress on their psychosocial wellbeing in the context of the parent-adult child relationship.' A longitudinal study was conducted with 323 emerging adults. This study is focused on how perceived stress affects their psychosocial well-being in the context of relationships with parents. The study explored direct and indirect pathways by using structural equation modelling, involving parents' marital satisfaction, social support, personality traits, parenting behaviour, and young adults' characteristics such as autonomy and purpose in life. Guided by Belsky's parenting model and family stress theory, the findings showed that perceived stress, purpose in life, and parental support directly influenced young adults' psychosocial well-being. The study highlights the importance of reducing stress and strengthening purposeful living and supportive parent-child relationships to enhance well-being during emerging adulthood.

Popa-Velea et al. (2021) examined the influence of self-efficacy, optimism, resilience, and perceived stress on academic performance and students' satisfaction with their own results. The sample consists of 118 medical undergraduates. The study found that low optimism and resilience, combined with high perceived stress, were associated with a poorer GPA. Preclinical students reported higher stress, but stress negatively impacted GPA mainly in clinical students, suggesting cumulative stress effects. No gender differences were observed. Clinical students were less satisfied with their academic performance. These findings highlighted the importance of promoting psychological strengths and stress-management strategies to improve

academic outcomes and student well-being. Saleh et al. (2017) conducted the study to evaluate a model of vulnerability to stress in French college students. Results revealed that more than half of the sample was suffering from psychological distress, anxiety and depression. Regression analysis suggested that life satisfaction, self-esteem, optimism, self-efficacy and psychological distress were the most important predictors of stress. It also serves as a better tool to understand stress vulnerability factors in students and to consider them in prevention programs. Duanaeva et al (2023) examined a “cross-cultural Study of Resilience, Stress, and Coping Behaviour as Prerequisites” for the success of international students. Results show that there were no significant differences between Kazakhstani students studying abroad and students from the Republic of Kazakhstan in terms of resilience, stress, and effectiveness of coping strategies. All groups of students from Kazakhs, Chinese, and Indians studying abroad have more differences than similarities in the level of resilience, stress, and coping behaviour. Gender showed no difference. Overall results suggest that resilience may decrease with age, and stress increases with age.

Discussion

The present study reviewed the literature collectively by including demographic details, cross-cultural research and demonstrated that lifestyle behaviour and stress are interrelated factors and deeply influenced by psychological, physical, social, cultural, and global norms. National and international studies suggested evidence of a growing population becoming the victim of stress due to various stressors such as global education, increased screen time, changing family and educational norms, etc. Lifestyle is a broad term that includes quality of sleep, diet or nutrition, physical exercise, screen time, substance abuse, social support, etc. Stress is the reaction of an individual towards any unexpected stimuli or situation. Stress depends on how one perceives the situation. Statistical data show that today's youth is under extreme stress. Across various cultural and cross-cultural studies, it is proven that emerging adults are suffering from stress due to the increasing demands of society. The above reviews also proposed the central role of sleep and physical activity. Multiple studies highlighted the role of insufficient sleep as the most consistent correlate of stress, anxiety, fatigue and depressive symptoms. (Long, 2025; Manteca-Bryła et al., 2005). Low engagement in physical activity is frequently associated with poorer mood, higher psychological distress, and weaker coping patterns (Deasy et al., 2015). • Another important underlying dimension across the literature is the role of psychological resources, such as self-efficacy, self-esteem, optimism, resilience, adjustment, academic stress, screen time and social support. “Cross-cultural Study of Resilience, Stress, and Coping behaviour as Prerequisites” suggested the role of academic stress, optimism and resilience is universal globally. Gender showed no difference. Resistance increases with age, while stress may be reduced with age. (Duanaeva et al., 2023)

Conclusion:

The reviews of the existing theoretical and empirical literature indicate that Lifestyle behaviour has a significant influence on stress. Lifestyle behaviour includes sleep, diet pattern, physical activity, screen time, time management and social support, etc. Consistent findings of various national and international studies demonstrate that changing global educational patterns, social norms, and increasing responsibilities are escalating continuous stress in emerging adults. Present research on existing reviews provides deep insight into early detection and screening of borderline cases, as well as serves as a useful,

essential tool in preparing a tailored stress-reduction program for a diverse population.

Psychological variables such as self-efficacy, optimism and social support will help to buffer the stress. Consistent results of various populations and diverse cultures showed a cyclical relationship between lifestyle behaviour and stress. Stress undermines healthy behaviour while unhealthy behaviour exacerbates stress. Further research should be expanded in longitudinal studies, cross-cultural studies and intervention-based studies to understand the pathway and holistic model for the prevention and minimisation of stress. Intervention-based strategies will foster a healthy environment among institutions and organisations worldwide.

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