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# A Systematic Review of Factors that Impact College Student Stress

Cailyn Papp

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A Systematic Review of Factors that Impact College Student Stress

by

Cailyn Papp

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Approved by:

<br><br><br>

_____
Dr. Ragan Downey, Ph.D., Thesis Advisor,
School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science and Security

<br><br><br>

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Dr. Bridget Hayden, Ph.D., Interim Director,
School of Criminal Justice, Forensic Science and Security

<br><br><br>

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Ellen Weinauer, Ph.D., Dean
Honors College

# ABSTRACT

Over the past few years, the effects of college student stress have received increased attention. Even so, there is still no unified model for addressing and understanding its impact. The purpose of this study was to systematically review and analyze the literature on college student stress to discover what factors have the most impact on it. A literature search using EBSCOhost yielded 20 eligible articles to include in this research. The results of this study demonstrate a need for a more unified model of college student stress. Further, results identify the factors that significantly influence college student stress and highlight why it is important to both understand college student stress and strive to mitigate its impact.

*Keywords: Stressor(s), interpersonal stress, intrapersonal stress, environmental stress, academic stress*

# DEDICATION

I am dedicating this thesis to my oldest sister, Samantha Papp. Samantha, thank you for never letting me give up on myself. You see my potential even when I do not, and words cannot describe how lucky I am to have you as my oldest sister, role model, and best friend. Thank you for believing in me. I love you.

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First, I would like to thank the faculty and staff in USM's Honors College for always being there for their students and never letting us feel like we are on our own. Even during the COVID-19 pandemic, the Honors College team never stopped reaching out to students and supporting us. The Honors College opened many doors for me during my time at USM, and through this program I have met people who will continue to be part of my life once my chapter at USM is complete.

Next, thank you to my family and friends, who were my biggest supporters during this process. Having a support system as amazing as mine made this process—which included some stressful nights, anxiety-filled days, and endless discussions about my thesis—extraordinary. Words cannot describe how thankful I am to have each of you in my life.

Finally, my biggest thank you goes to my thesis adviser, Dr. Ragan Downey. Dr. Downey, your mentorship has helped me grow as a student, researcher, and person. Thank you for the days, weeks, and months you devoted to being my adviser. You have impacted me greatly, and I am lucky to have worked with someone as intelligent and dedicated as you.

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| | |
|---|---|
| APA | American Psychological Association |
| CCMH | Center for Collegiate Mental Health |
| EQ-I:S | Emotional Quotient Inventory Short |
| LSI | UCLA Life Stress Interview |
| MSS | Multi-Dimensional Stress Scale |
| PSS | Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale |
| SASS | Symptoms and Assets Screening Scale |
| SDS | Standardized Data Set |
| USM | The University of Southern Mississippi |

# CHAPTER I: INTRODUCTION

Stress is an issue faced by many individuals in society. Although definitions of stress vary, the most common definition for stress is any type of life event that causes a person to feel overwhelmed, anxious, and disorganized (Epel et al., 2018). Stress is problematic because it can negatively one's impact health, examples include causing digestive issues and obesity (McEwen & Robert, 2006). Stress can also weaken the immune system, lead to anxiety and depression, seriously affect daily life and decision-making processes, and increase blood pressure and heart rate (McEwen & Robert, 2006).

Along with these potential health issues, research suggests that stress can have a particularly negative impact on college students. Adjusting to college life and moving away from home can cause college students to feel overwhelmed as they face new responsibilities, schedules, and peers. These feelings can lead to poor mental and physical health (Hubbard et al., 2018). When college students experience stress, they are more likely to neglect self-care and health in order to focus on what they perceive as more important at the time (Hubbard et al., 2018). When facing mounting academic responsibilities, for instance, college students may prioritize their assignments over their need for ample sleep. Research indicates that stress directly impacts college students in a variety of ways, including their academics, finances, relationships, sleep habits, eating habits, and work ethic (Hubbard et al., 2018).

Given the unique impact of stress on college students, those involved in higher education should be particularly concerned with helping college students recognize and manage their stress. Those who regularly engage with college students—including professors and other higher education staff—should be trained to help college students

handle their stress. Such training could include preparing students for stress, offering ways to lessen the effects of stress, and providing strategies for coping with stress. By developing a better understanding of the stress college students face, those in higher education can create strategies for providing support when stress arises, with a goal of reducing negative outcomes. Additionally, society as a whole can hopefully develop a better understanding of student stress and be better equipped to deal with the factors or stressors that impact college students.

As Epel and colleagues (2018) explain, studying stress can be challenging because there are various definitions for stress and no unified model to consult when conducting research. Recently, researchers have become increasingly aware of the complexity involved in understanding stress. This complexity is largely due to the fact that stress has multiple components: social, psychological, and physiological (Epel et al., 2018). Attempts to better understand stress have revealed that stress measurement is unorganized and chaotic. To develop a unified model for stress, there first should be better ways to communicate about stress (Epel et al., 2018). After developing better ways to communicate about it, stress can then be accurately measured. To do this, Epel et al. (2018) recommend implementing a common language for discussing stress and a more detailed and complex model that can account for the multiple dimensions of stress. The challenges caused by a lack of a unified model appear not only when studying stress generally but also when exploring college student stress specifically.

**Statement of the Problem**

Stress is any type of situation where people are negatively impacted in their academic performance, personal life, or health (Epel et al., 2018). There are an

abundance of studies and research on stress and its influencing factors, but there is a lack of a unified model for performing such research. Studying specific types of stress, such as college student stress, is challenging due to the different models that researchers use to represent it. It follows that statements claiming the need for a more unified model of stress are reasonable; such a model would not only lead to better research but also improve the organizational aspects of studying college student stress.

**Purpose of the Study**

Gaining a better understanding of college student stress while focusing on the factors that most predominantly influence it is important because college is often a crucial stage for young people. College is where many people discover who they are and what they want their future to entail. Stress can be a critical factor affecting college students' overall physical health and mental well-being, and its effects can be long-lasting. Stress is such a common occurrence that it is often downplayed (Epel et al., 2018). By bringing attention and awareness to college student stress and the factors that influence it the most, college students may ultimately be better prepared for stress and be provided coping mechanisms to help mitigate stress and its effects. Further, by bringing attention to college student stress, a better, more unified model of college student stress can be developed.

In response to the inconsistency of definitions when discussing stress and the absence of a unified model of stress, this thesis provides a systematic review of existing studies on college student stress and explores variations within that body of research. This exploratory analysis aims to (1) describe variations in methods of measurement, (2)

assess corresponding strengths and weaknesses of each study, and (3) critically analyze

the methods and metrics employed in a sample of the existing literature.

**Definition of Terms**

The following terms apply to this thesis:

*Academic Stress:* Academic stress is experienced as a result of anything school-related, such as course difficulty, professor expectations, and course load.

*College Student Stress:* College student stress occurs when college students experience an overwhelming amount of stress which results in burnout, lack of motivation, and loss of enjoyment.

*Environmental Stress:* Environmental stress is caused by one's environment, such as noises, temperatures, or crowds.

*External Stress:* External stress results from any situation directly impacting a person, such as a major life change.

*Intrapersonal Stress*: Intrapersonal stress comes from within the person and is a type of feeling or emotion.

*Internal Stress:* Internal stress comes from within a person, such as worrying about a situation beyond one's control.

*Interpersonal Stress:* Interpersonal stress results from situations involving other people, such as peers, family members, and significant others.

*Stress:* Stress is the result of a situation or feeling that leads to a negative body response, including physical, emotional, or psychological responses.

# CHAPTER II: LITERATURE REVIEW

This literature review provides an overview of the extant literature regarding college student stress. The purpose of this chapter is to highlight and discuss three common characteristics of stress research: (1) the conceptualization and measurement of stress; (2) the dimensions of stress; and (3) the factors that impact stress.

## Measurements of Stress

Holinka (2015) emphasized the uniqueness of college student stress, noting it typically involves pressures related to career selection, financial stability and burdens, interpersonal relationships, appearance, personal achievement, goal-setting, and academic responsibilities. In the literature, researchers do not use one specific definition of stress; instead, stress is defined in a variety of ways. In Bhujade's (2017) research, the term stress referred to the psychological state which negatively affects a person's ability to achieve the success required to effectively conform to the society's demands. Stress has also been defined as any type of situation or conflict that produces and encourages negative thoughts, feelings, and actions in people, especially college students (Dalton & Hammen, 2018). It should also be noted that the word "stress" refers to the factors that contribute to the internal state of stress and is used synonymously with the term "stressor." A discussion of the various measurements of stress follows.

Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS)

Eisenbarth (2019), Griffin et al. (2020), and Holinka (2015) all used Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) in their research. The PSS is a Likert-type scale with a value range of 0-4 (Griffin et al., 2020). The PSS self-report scale consists of 14 items which aid participants in evaluating how their current situations affect their stress by assessing

how unpredictable, uncontrollable, and overwhelmed the participants feel their lives are at that moment in time. Using the PSS, participants answer questions such as "How often have you felt difficulties were stacking up to the point you felt you could not achieve them or overcome them?" Questions were focused on their life difficulties and situations causing stress (Griffin et al., 2020). Eisenbarth (2019) used the PSS to study and survey college student stress. While using the PSS, Eisenbarth (2019) employed a 5-point Likert Scale to evaluate how often college students felt overwhelmed, out of control, and unable to predict their lives. On this scale, one meant "never" and five meant "very often" (Eisenbarth, 2019). Like Eisenbarth (2019), Holinka (2015) also applied a 5-point Likert Scale to assess college students' feelings, by asking them to rank how they felt the prior month. After employing the PSS, Holinka (2015) then placed participants who scored at or below a 42 in the lower stress levels group and placed those who scored higher than a 42 in the higher stress levels group. In research by Griffin et al. (2020), Cohen's PSS asked students questions about their lives within a two-week period, including how often they felt overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities they needed to accomplish and whether they felt they were unachievable. Griffin et al. (2020) conducted this study by having students participate through the use of log sheets they were asked to fill out at home and then return at the end of the two-week period. This was done consecutively over an eight-week period and, after those eight weeks, the data was analyzed.

Other Likert Scales

A Likert Scale is commonly used in research due to its simplicity when conducting surveys (Holinka, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Karaman et al., 2019; Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Nonis et al., 1998; Stagman, 2011). Stagman (2011)

used a 5-point Likert scale to measure 51 items that pertain to academic stressors and college students' response to stress. On this scale, one represented "never" while five represented "most of the time" (Stagman, 2011). Applying this Likert Scale, Stagman (2011) measured not only college students' levels of academic stressors but also their reactions to such stress. Some examples of the items surveyed included "I have experienced pressures due to an overload of attempting too many things at one time," and "I have experienced daily hassles which affected me in reaching my goals." These are statements students have while experiencing frustrations, life changes, self-expectations, emotions, and daily challenges (Stagman, 2011).

Jones et al. (2018) employed two 5-point Likert Scales. One scale used descriptors ranging from "strongly disagree" to "strongly agree" and the other ranging from "always stressful" to "never stressful." Jones and colleagues found that academic stress, financial stress, and peer support are the main factors when it comes to stress in college students, with academic stress occurring most frequently. Similarly, Nonis et al. (1998) applied a seven-point Likert Scale, with one representing "not at all stressful" and seven representing "extremely stressful." Nonis et al.'s (1998) scale measured the intensity of college students' stress based on factors such as students' ability to meet deadlines, time management, and course expectations.

Kearns and Gardiner (2007) also used a seven-point Likert Scale to measure perceived effectiveness, work-related morale issues, and distress in college students. The scale measured items such as students' sense of control over their lives and the pressures of working and being a college student, among other things. In their research, Karaman et al. (2019) used both a 5-point and a 7-point Likert Scale. The 5-point scale ranged from

one for "never" to five for "most of this time" and gauged the levels of academic stress

that college students experienced, such as failing grades, professor expectations, and time

management. Their 7-point Likert Scale measured college students' life satisfaction, with

one meaning "strongly disagree" and seven meaning "strongly agree."

UCLA Life Stress Interview (LSI)

Dalton and Hammen (2018) used the UCLA Life Stress Interview (LSI) in their

research on the independent and relative effects of stress on college students. The LSI is

an interview that uses probes to gather responses regarding standard and current life

conditions for college students. The LSI is considered a legitimate and accurate

assessment measure, especially when studying young adults such as college students

(Dalton & Hammen, 2018). These authors used the LSI to measure chronic stress in

college students based on life domains such as academics, family, peers, personal

relationships, and finances. The LSI in this study addressed stressful events and perceived

stressfulness to measure chronic stress, ranging from one (exceptionally positive

conditions) to five (extremely severe conditions). For example, researchers inquired

information about stressful life events that had happened within the prior three months,

how many hours the students slept at night, and how often they consumed alcohol. This

method was employed to assess relationships between stress, stressors, and health

behaviors in 127 college students. Using the LSI allowed researchers to identify the

effects of chronic and acute stress that college students encounter and observe how that

stress affected their health behaviors such as self-care, diet, and physical exercise.

Symptoms and Assets Screening Scale (SASS)

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Hubbard et al. (2018) used the Symptoms and Assets Screening Scale (SASS) in their research. The SASS consists of 34 self-report-based items that are used to measure overall stress. In this study, participants were required to respond to each item and evaluate how much their experiences correlated to each item using a Likert-type scale (Hubbard et al., 2018). The SASS measured 5-items (depressive symptoms, anxiety symptoms, substance problems, eating problems, and well-being) with a potential score ranging from 0 to 15 in each category. The SASS scores were calculated by assessing college students' psychological distress, symptoms of depression and anxiety, substance abuse, eating disorders, and help-seeking behaviors.

Multi-Dimensional Stress Scale (MSS)

Along with the SASS, Hubbard et al. (2018) also implemented the Multi-Dimensional Stress Scale (MSS) in their research. The MSS measures college student stress by providing researchers with extensive input into stressors college students frequently experience, such as finances, academics, and substance abuse. Hubbard and colleagues (2018) used this 32-item self-report measurement survey to comprehensively assess and review stressors college students face. Participants were directed to read each of the items listed and then specify how often each stressor had negatively impacted their mental health within the prior year (Hubbard et al., 2018). Hubbard and colleagues performed their research by surveying 564 colleges students. Participants could select as many of the 32 MSS items as they saw fit; however, there were no more than 32 options to choose from. The results of the study were categorized as follows: twenty-three of the 32 MSS items were said to be either intrapersonal stressors, interpersonal stressors, performance stressors, or financial stressors. Four of these items were intrapersonal

stressors, eight of them were interpersonal stressors, eight more were performance

stressors, and three of them were financial stressors. The remaining 9 items were placed

into a miscellaneous stressor category (Hubbard et al., 2018). Results of their study

helped researchers better understand the types of stressors college students encounter the

most.

Emotional Quotient Inventory Short (EQ-I:s)

Research by Holinka (2015) included the Emotional Quotient Inventory Short

(EQ-I:s). The EQ-I:s method allows researchers to gather data by using 51 items that

consider the emotional capabilities, competencies, and skills people require to cope with

environmental demands and stress pressure. Holinka (2015) used the EQ-I:s method to

measure environmental demands and stress pressure by taking college students' raw

scores on the EQ-I:s and converting them into standard scores with a mean of 100 and a

standard deviation of 15 to determine total emotional intelligence. There are also five

subscales in EQ-I:s used to measure stress, which are Intrapersonal EQ, Interpersonal

EQ, Stress Management EQ, Adaptability, and General Mood EQ (Holinka, 2015).

**Common Dimensions of Stress**

Musabiq and Karimah (2020) suggested that many factors can impact stress, such

as life events, academics, chronic stressors, and daily stress. Many researchers measure

various dimensions of stress, rather than stress as a single construct, due to the fact that

there are numerous different types of stress. For example, factors such as academic

pressures, parent expectations, self-expectations, peer relationships, job performance, and

time management can all impact college students and cause stress. By organizing stress

into four dimensions, as discussed below, researchers are better able to pinpoint the

specific type of stress college students experience. In doing so, researchers can find ways to more accurately measure that stress, help college students pinpoint the stressors causing the stress, and develop ways to help college students cope and manage their stress.

Four Dimensions of Stress

The four dimensions of stress consist of interpersonal stress, intrapersonal stress, academic stress, and environmental stress (Hubbard et al., 2018; Nonis et al., 1998; Musabiq & Karimah, 2020). These dimensions are used to help researchers categorize the types of stressors that impact college student stress. Musabiq and Karimah (2020) use the four dimensions to assess stress that college students face and gauge the impact of that stress on students. Hubbard and colleagues (2018) used the four dimensions of stress in their research as well. In their research, Nonis et al. (1998) also used the four dimensions of stress to measure and categorize college student stress. They used slightly different terms for the four dimensions of stress, however, defining them as academic stress, financial stress, familial stress, and personal stress. Upon comparing definitions, Nonis et al.'s (1998) four dimensions of stress align with the four dimensions of stress that Musabiq and Karimah used in their research (Nonis et al., 1998). In addition to the four dimensions of stress, Musabiq and Karimah (2020) also studied what they called the four aspects of stress effect. They defined the four aspects of stress effect as physical, cognitive, emotional, and behavioral (Musabiq & Karimah, 2020).

*Interpersonal Stress.* Interpersonal stress is stress caused by situations that involve other people, such as stress relating to relationships and families (Acharya et al., 2018; Epel et al., 2018; Hubbard et al., 2018; Musabiq & Karimah, 2020; Nonis et al.,

1998; Reddy et al., 2014). Epel et al. (2018) defined interpersonal stress as the sense of feeling alone, feeling socially isolated, having relationship issues, or experiencing discrimination. Any type of conflict or incident in relationships with other people can cause interpersonal stress, and this type of stress is often the most common out of the four dimensions (Nisa & Nizami, 2014).

Transitioning from high school to college is an extremely stressful event. For most college students, stress begins during the first year when they transition into college, which can feel sudden and abrupt. For others, stress can come from moving to a new place and leaving behind friends and family, which would be categorized as interpersonal stress. Bhujade (2017) found that the many "firsts" college students experience can lead to a profound amount of stress. Not only does the transition into college cause stress, but the pressure to succeed and thrive while in college causes substantial stress as well. Bhujade's (2017) found that stress among college students frequently arises as a result of high education expectations, being independent and alone in a new setting, less family interaction, changes in social events, and meeting and adjusting to new people. College students then have to manage the issues that can result from each of these stressors. Some of these challenges include time management issues, the fear of failing and disappointing others, the struggle to self-identify, and the pressure to succeed. These challenges all relate to stressors that would be categorized as interpersonal stress.

College students tend to experience high levels of stress when their social lives and social activities change (Reddy et al., 2014). Nonis et al. (1998) found that college students experience high levels of interpersonal stress when difficulties with professors, friends, or significant others arise. Male college students are more likely to experience

interpersonal stress than female college students, particularly due to worrying about finances, feeling a sense of loneliness, experiencing a breakup, or losing a family member (Acharya et al., 2018). Musabiq and Karimah (2020) suggested that interpersonal stress is not as commonly experienced by college students as other types of stress, but found that when college students faced interpersonal stress, it generally resulted from a relationship conflict with a significant other. Hubbard et al. (2018) found that interpersonal stress can lead to substance abuse in male and female college students, as well as a high rate of depression in female students. These findings indicate that stress impacts all students regardless of gender. Hubbard et al. (2018) concluded that the presence of interpersonal stress could influence and predict the level of anxiety in college students.

Dalton and Hammen (2018) sought to understand the interpersonal factors that affect mental health in college students. Because of the wide range of factors that can impact college student stress and mental health, Hubbard and colleagues (2018) sought to research the different types of stressors which relate to mental health in college students. In this study, college students reported that their main stressors involved academics, finances, relationships, and insomnia. The body of research in this area shows that stressors in college students can increase their chances of developing mental health issues, which can cause significant problems if left untreated. The research further suggests that there are a wide variety of stressors that can influence mental health issues in college students, which can range from relationships to gender (Hubbard et al., 2018).

*Intrapersonal Stress*. Intrapersonal stress occurs internally through emotions and feelings (Acharya et al., 2018; Holinka, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018; Musabiq & Karimah, 2020; Reddy et al., 2014). Holinka (2015) revealed that intrapersonal stressors were the

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most common sources of stress in college students, with the top five intrapersonal stressors being sleep habits, eating habits, breaks, new responsibilities, and course workload. Reddy et al. (2014) also indicated that that intrapersonal stress was the most commonly reported source of stress in college students. Further, they revealed that intrapersonal stress in college students was a result of many factors, but primarily resulted from changes in sleeping habits. Acharya et al. (2018) studied stressors in male and female college students, which included intrapersonal stressors such as diets and sleeping habits. Musabiq and Karimah (2020) discovered a great deal of college student stress comes from intrapersonal stressors, focusing on financial issues and time management. Hubbard et al. (2018) concluded that the students' level of intrapersonal stress can predict anxiety and depression in male and female college students.

Financial stress in college students is also an issue, and it can cause a decrease in physical and mental health (Jones et al., 2018). College students may work long hours to help finance their education, which gives them less time to complete their assignments and ability to study, causing high levels of intrapersonal stress. College students' level of social support also affects their stress. College students rely heavily on friends and family for emotional support. They need to be encouraged that they can achieve their goals and they can make it through college. Without social and emotional support, college students tend to feel that they are on their own and their stress levels increase drastically (Jones et al., 2018).

*Academic Stress.* Academic stress refers to college students' response to school and related challenges, such as academic demands, professor expectations, course load, and grades (Acharya et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Musabiq & Karimah, 2020; Reddy et

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al., 2014; Stagman, 2011). College students tend to experience academic stress in extreme amounts while transitioning into college for the first time and can be overwhelmed by due dates, study habits, exams, and their course load (Acharya et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Stagman, 2011). College students can also experience academic stress when they try to manage a great deal of academic responsibility and overload themselves with campus involvement Further, they experience the most academic stress when planning their study schedules, balancing their course work, and failing classes (Musabiq & Karimah, 2020). Reddy et al. (2014) found undergraduate students experience more academic stress than graduate students.

*Environmental Stress.* Environmental stress is a result of the stimuli presented in a person's environment examples of which include traffic, car wrecks, and uncomfortable places or situations. Musabiq & Karimah, 2020). Musabiq and Karimah (2020) examined the impact environmental stress can have on chronic and daily stressors, which they characterized as subsets of environmental stress. Chronic stressors are a direct result of a long-lasting problem, incident, or conflict and have the tendency to stem from personal situations. For example, chronic stress can result from emotions, environments, relationships, or work. Daily stressors are a result of anything that causes minor adjustments throughout the day, yet seem drastic (Musabiq & Karimah, 2020). Daily stressors can include running late for school, lack of sleep, arguing with a friend or loved one, upcoming due dates, or time management issues.

**Factors Impacting Student Stress**

Stress is a prevalent challenge arguably faced by many people, and there are a variety of factors that contribute to stress. These factors, often referred to as stressors, are

defined as situations that cause people to feel and experience an abundance of stress (Epel et al., 2018). The types of factors discussed in this section are demographics, physical and mental health, self-perception, and emotional intelligence. The following items in this section do not inherently and independently act as stressors; rather, they are variables that have been associated with how people react to stressors.

Demographics

Demographics include anything used to describe a certain population, such as age, race, or gender (Acharya et al., 2018; Eisenbarth, 2019; Holinka, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018; Jones et al., 2018; Karaman et al., 2019; Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Reddy et al., 2014; Stagman, 2011). Reddy et al. (2014) discussed the socio-demographic schedule, which includes factors such as age, religion, father's education, mother's education, and family size, and found that undergraduate students experience more stress than graduate students, but that when it comes to coping mechanisms both types of students handle stress equally. Stagman (2011) collected participant demographics such as age, race, sex, and family history through a Participant Information Form for their research. By using this type of measurement, Stagman (2011) found that students with better time management skills tended to better respond to stress and stressors than those without such skills.

Acharya et al. (2018) used age, sex, race, and background history when conducting their research and comparing their results. Jones et al. (2018) also used the same demographics when gathering information on stress, and also used sociodemographic information in their results section. Kearns and Gardiner (2007) included a questionnaire specifically designed to measure demographic information, time

management behaviors, and effectiveness. Karaman et al. (2019) also included a demographic questionnaire in their research methods and measures. Eisenbarth (2019) used demographic characteristics in analyzing data between male and female participants. Hubbard et al. (2018) used demographic questions in their procedures while conducting research. Holinka (2015) used a type of demographic survey in the materials section of their research. Examples of the demographics she included are age, school year, gender, race, and current housing situation. Holinka's (2015) research revealed that types of demographics can potentially predict and have a great amount of impact of the types of stress college students experience. Thus, demographics are commonly examined when evaluating student stress, and they can play an important role in studying stress in college students' lives.

Physical and Mental Health

Research suggests that anxiety has become the most common mental health concern in college students as a result of stress (Jones et al., 2018). Jones et al. (2018) found that college students reported being stressed due to feeling overwhelmed, exhausted, hopeless, and overly anxious while in school. These students also reported that, as a result of feeling this way, they experienced lower academic performance, less job satisfaction, and job burnout. Jones et al. (2018) discovered that college student stress is closely related to anxiety. They asked college students to list any major concerns the students had, which included academic performance, pressure to succeed, and post-graduation plans. Jones et al. (2018) concluded that the relationship between stress and anxiety is bidirectional, meaning their relationship moves in two different directions, with each characteristic having the potential to cause the other.

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Stress can directly affect college students' physical and mental health, as well as health-related behaviors such as sleeping, eating, exercise, and more; these factors impact psychological factors (Dalton & Hammen, 2018). Depression is a worldwide issue that affects 34.5% of college students, a percentage that does not include those who did not report their feelings of depression to researchers or other adults (Acharya et al., 2018). College students who reported feelings of depression stated that their symptoms developed as a result of stress, and can result in anxiety disorders, substance use, decreased academic performance, and suicide. Stress is inevitable and will be encountered throughout life; college students are even more exposed to stress as they are transitioning into unknown territory and a new chapter of life (Acharya et al., 2018). Acharya et al. (2018) conducted research to identify serious stressors in college students, examine the relationships between those stressors and depression, compare the symptoms of depression in each group, and determine the gender differences in each level of stress. Acharya et al. (2018) concluded there are eight stressors that impact college students the most: depressive symptoms, gender, domestic status, change in social activities, work with people they did not know, change in sleeping habits, change in eating habits, increased class workload, failing grades, unfamiliar situations, and change in living environments.

When dealing with emotions, there are also factors that result in higher levels of stress. These factors include feelings of inferiority, failing to thrive and make decisions, overthinking and worrying, and feeling like there is no point in continuing their college career (Bhujade, 2017). These emotions are seen in Dalton and Hammen's (2018)

research where they found that chronic and daily stress were tied to negative health behaviors in college students.

Self-Perception

Self-perception directly affects student stress and health, and there is a negative correlation between stress and student health (Goldman & Wong, 1997). That is, as college students' stress increased, their problem-solving ability decreased. Goldman and Wong (1997) also concluded that the more college students focus on a problem, the more their health is affected. Having a negative self-perception due to stress can contribute to more stress and even cause depression and anxiety in college students.

How college students interpret their situations and circumstances is fundamental to the amount of stress these events cause (Goldman & Wong, 1997). Stress becomes an issue when demands and expectations are higher than a student's ability to cope, and Goldman and Wong (1997) found that the existence of stress itself ultimately depends on the existence and presence of a stressor. They also found that college students with higher amounts of stress had lower amounts of satisfaction when it came to employment, course work, grades, and social life. Additionally, Nisa and Nizami (2014) focused their research on the four dimensions of stress, finding that stress was the primary cause of self-injury and suicide in college students. They concluded that stress in college students can negatively affect their self-perception (Nisa & Nizami, 2014).

Emotional Intelligence

A decrease in college students' emotional intelligence can have a direct impact on their stress levels. According to Puri et al. (2016), emotional intelligence is a person's ability to perceive emotions in oneself and others, manage those emotions, and handle

their relationships with others. When college students first start their path to a degree, it can be frightening, overwhelming, and stressful. If college students experience an exceptional amount of stress, their functioning levels can be severely affected. A decline in emotional intelligence can influence suicidal thoughts, depression, and much more (Puri et al., 2016).

Puri et al. (2016) explored emotional intelligence and stress in college students, and their study assessed the relationship between college student stress and emotional intelligence. Their study was conducted using first- and second-year college students, with 300 students from a college of Jaipur city surveyed from the College of Science, the College of Commerce, and the College of Arts using a Stress Scale for Students created by the researchers. Puri et al. (2016) used the theorized five major parts of emotional intelligence in the survey by providing an assessment score for each part. The five major parts of emotional intelligence are knowing our own emotions, managing our emotions, motivating ourselves, recognizing the emotions of others, and handling our relationships. They found that college students with high levels of emotional intelligence are better equipped to handle stress and its effects, although this cannot be said for all college students (Puri et al., 2016). They also found that college students who are high functioning in terms of emotional intelligence are more likely to be in control of their emotions and behaviors when faced with stress.

Research by Holinka (2015) also focused on emotional intelligence and stress in college students, but she emphasized that, for college students, stress can be the most unpleasant encounter they face and can create many negative outcomes. This research emphasized the gravity of stress and how important stress is in regard to college students'

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mental and physical health and overall well-being (Holinka, 2015). Holinka's research

consisted of 144 undergraduate students who were currently taking Introduction to

Psychology at the University of Southern Connecticut (Holinka, 2015). There were four

types of measurements used throughout this study: demographic surveys, stress and stress

levels, life satisfaction, and emotional intelligence (Holinka, 2015). The demographic

survey was brief, asking questions regarding the participants' age, gender, and current

year in college. The stress portion of the study measured student stress using the PSS.

Holinka (2015) study, which also employed the Satisfaction with Life Scale

(SWLS), was designed to measure college student life satisfaction by assessing data from

five different self-report items. These researchers also studied emotional intelligence by

using the EQ-I:s. Each measurement and survey was conducted anonymously and

monitored online by the Department of Psychology at the participating university. Once

all the surveys and measurements were complete, the participants were then given a

debriefing statement. The results of this study revealed that there is a negative correlation

between stress, life satisfaction, and emotional intelligence (Holinka, 2015).

Jones et al. (2018) studied data from the Center for Collegiate Mental Health

(CCMH) 2013-2014 data set. This data set consisted of information gathered from

101,027 students who sought help at college counseling units throughout the United

States. Participants in this study were only accepted if they gave researchers demographic

information through the Standardized Data Set (SDS). Data from this study were

reviewed three different ways. First, the relationship between college students'

demographic variables and stress was assessed. Second, key variables, such as anxiety,

academic stress, financial stress, peer support, and family support, were analyzed through

the use of bivariate and semi-partial correlations. Third, a regression analysis was conducted which examined how each set of key variables predicted variance in student stress (Jones et al., 2018). This study provided new information that has the potential to be useful to colleges. Researchers discovered that academic stress, financial stress, family support, and peer support are the main causes of stress and anxiety in college students.

The purpose of this chapter was to highlight and discuss three common characteristics of stress research: the conceptualization and measurement of stress, the dimensions of stress, and the factors that impact stress. Review of the literature revealed that the four dimensions of stress are the most common ways to categorize and study the factors that influence college student stress. Those same four dimensions of stress are also used to determine what influences those factors and how people can better understand how they happen. The review of literature aided in the development of a recommendation for a more unified model of stress as well as recommendations for future research.

# CHAPTER III: METHODOLOGY

The purpose of this study is to conduct an exploratory analysis of existing research regarding college student stress. This study chose to perform a systematic review, which provides an unbiased way to identify and critically analyze literature on the topic at hand (Epel et al., 2018). By doing this, the author was able to use the articles reviewed to aid in developing methodology. Specifically, this analysis aims to (1) describe variations in methods of measurement, (2) assess corresponding strengths and weaknesses of research, and (3) critically analyze methods and metrics employed in a sample of the existing literature. This sort of analysis requires a cursory review of a large body of literature and conceptualization of appropriate criteria for selecting specific works for inclusion into a manageable sample (Epel et al., 2018).

**Selection Process**

The information gathered for this review consisted of studies that focused on and evaluated college student stress, stressors, and the effects of stress. This author collected articles using EBSCOhost database, which is an online search engine used by The University of Southern Mississippi (USM) that provides access to scholarly journals, publications, and a wide variety of research. When searching the EBSCOhost database for articles, the following search terms were used: college, student, stress, stressors, and impacts. A total of 200 articles were available for cursory review. This stage of review involved assessing each available article for inclusion and exclusion criteria applicable to developing a sample of articles for detailed review.

Inclusion criteria included the following: the research articles had to be published within the past 10 years, specifically discuss college student stress, discuss impact

factors, and be a scholarly article. This type of inclusion criteria was beneficial due to the fact it kept the author from obtaining literature that could have potentially provided inaccurate findings or skewed data. The purpose of keeping the date range of publications within the past 10 years was to ensure that the research was up-to-date, particularly because research is constantly changing, and new findings regularly emerge. After more than a decade, however, publications often become outdated and no longer align with current analysis methods. Exclusion criteria included: any articles older than ten years, articles published outside of the United States, research conducted outside of the United States, and research that did not focus on college students. By limiting the types of articles used and sticking to the exclusion criteria, this author was able to ensure every source used was reliable. After this process was completed, a total of twenty research studies were retained for detailed analysis (See Table 1). Appendix A provides findings and characteristics of each study.

*Table 1*

*Article Selection Process*

| Review Stages | n |
|---|---|
| Initial search results | 200 |
| Excluded | 180 |
| *Publication date* | 110 |
| *Research conducted outside of the U.S.* | 25 |
| *Not focused on college students* | 45 |
| Retained | 22 |
| *Provided valuable background data* | 2 |
| *Retained for review and analysis* | 20 |
| Met all inclusion criteria | 18 |
| Exceeded date range | 2 |

Throughout the article selection process, five of the original twenty articles were excluded, and five new articles were obtained to replace of the rejected ones. The articles were excluded due to the fact they did not contain enough information on college student stress, ended up being out of the accepted date range, and were not considered to be reliable sources. Because of this, analysis of new articles provided this writer with better alternatives and research to utilize. The final number of articles used remained the same. As noted, an exception was made for two articles that were outside the date range because they met every other inclusion criterion and provided extremely useful supporting evidence and information.

As displayed in Table 1, two additional articles were retained for the sole purpose of providing background information on the specific research topic, such as health issues caused by stress. The articles included were analyzed for information that would aid this systematic review of literature and used to help contribute to a more unified model of student stress. In addition, the articles also provided foundational research related to college student stress and the impact factors of college student stress and to provide a better general understanding of college student stress.

Each aspect of the relevant research was analyzed to gain a better understanding of how stress in college students was studied and measured. Moreover, each research article was examined for similarities and differences in research designs and variables, and similar and dissimilar findings were considered. These articles offered key information related to impact factors, previous research and findings on college stress, and supporting evidence (See Table 1). The data found was then used to aid the creation

of a suggested unified model of stress as well as conduct a literature review to discuss the

findings and results of the article analysis. Throughout the research process, it was

important to examine studies involving all college students and not focus on a specific

year of college student (e.g., freshman or senior), as students experience stress throughout

their entire college career, not solely in the beginning or at the end of their career as those

are more likely to identify the reoccurring stressors and the factors that influence them

the most (Epel et al., 2018).

**Study Characteristics**

The following characteristics of each study were examined to facilitate the

research process: methodological approach, factors impacting of college student stress,

analysis of literature, and findings. The *methods used* characteristic was included to

determine the type of research method each study employed in order to aid in finding a

more unified model of student stress. The *impact factors* characteristic was incorporated

to pinpoint the items that influence college student stress. *Impact factors* in this case

pertains to, but is not limited to, the most common factors researchers have found that

influence stress among students. The *analysis* characteristic was included to determine

how college student stress was studied by researchers. The *findings* characteristic was

used to represent the findings of each article included and the commonalities between

research methods.

# CHAPTER IV: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The biggest factors that influenced stress in college students are represented in Appendix A. As displayed by Appendix A, students are most likely to experience interpersonal stress, intrapersonal stress, environmental stress, and academic stress. Appendix A was constructed by (1) describing the variations in methods of research measurement, (2) assessing corresponding strengths and weaknesses of research, and (3) critically analyzing methods and metrics employed in a sample of the existing literature. Each article was analyzed to find the scope of research, the number of college students used, the stress measure used, impact factors found, and the results of each study. The scope of the problem was found by reading each article and discovering the research goal. The total number of students, stress measures, and impact factors were discovered by reading how the research was conducted as well as analyzing data reported. The findings of each study were concluded by reviewing the results of each study. Appendix A provides a visual representation of how research was conducted, a summary of each article, and the findings of each article.

## Variations in Methods of Measurement

In order to identify variations in methods of measurement, each article was analyzed rigorously to determine the type of measurement used, how the study was conducted, and the outcome of each type of measurement (See Table 2). Analysis of the twenty articles included in this thesis revealed the most common types of measurements used were Cohen's PSS, the SWLS, EQ-I:s, the LSI, the SASS, and the MSS. Specifically, three articles used Cohen's PSS, one article used the SWLS, one article

used EQ-I:s, one article used the LSI, one article used the SASS, one article used the

MSS.

*Table 2*

*Measurements Used*

| Measurement Name | n |
| --- | --- |
| Cohen's PSS | 3 |
| SWLS | 1 |
| EQ-Q:S | 1 |
| LSI | 1 |
| SASS | 1 |
| MSS | 1 |
| Other | 12 |

Eisenbarth (2019), Griffin et al. (2020), and Holinka (2015) included Cohen's PSS as a research method in their studies. Eisenbarth (2019) used Cohen's PSS to evaluate college student stress, using a 5-point Likert-type scale where college students would rank how often they felt their lives were uncontrollable, overstimulating, and unpredictable (Eisenbarth, 2019). The scale Eisenbarth (2019) used ranged from one meaning "never" to five meaning "very often." Griffin et al. (2020) used a Likert-type scale ranging from zero to four when using Cohen's PSS. Cohen's PSS asked students questions about their lives within a two-week period, including how often they felt overwhelmed by the number of responsibilities they needed to accomplish and whether they felt they were unachievable (Griffin et al., 2020). Griffin et al. (2020) conducted this study by having students participate through the use of log sheets they were asked to fill out at home and then return at the end of the two-week period. This was done consecutively over an eight-week period and, after those eight weeks, the data were analyzed. Holinka (2015) measured college students' stress levels through Cohen's PSS.

To do this, she incorporated a 14-item self-report scale that reviewed the amount of stress various life situations can create (Holinka, 2015). The fourteen items assessed the way college students felt about their current situations; students were then asked respond to items on a five-point Likert scale (Holinka, 2015), which was used to analyze how often students felt things were going their way and how often they felt they were losing control of their lives. If a student had a high score, it meant they had higher levels of stress, whereas low scores suggested they had lower levels of stress (Holinka, 2015).

In addition to Cohen's PSS, Holinka (2015) also used the SWLS in her research to measure the amount of satisfaction college students had at the time of the study. This was done by using five self-report items consisting of questions pertaining to how close their lives are to what they expected them to be and evaluating those self-report items on a seven-point Likert scale. Holinka (2015) created a total score from the results of Cohen's PSS and the SWLS. In doing so, the researcher was able to conclude that college student stress negatively correlates with their life satisfaction. Holinka (2015) was the first study to include three different types of measurements while conducting research. Not only did she use Cohen's PSS and the SWLS, she also incorporated EQ-I:s in her research. The EQ-I:s was used to gather data on 51 items that evaluated the emotional capabilities and skills college students need to deal with the demands and stressors of their environment. Students were asked to evaluate these items on a five-point Likert scale and the scores from the EQ-I:s were then combined with the SWLS scores to find a positive correlation between emotional intelligence in college students and life satisfaction (Holinka, 2015).

Dalton and Hammen (2018) studied college student stress through the LSI, which measured chronic life stress related to academics, friends and family, and finances over a six-month period. Scores from the LSI ranged from one meaning "exceptionally positive conditions" to five meaning "extremely difficult, negative conditions" (Dalton & Hammen, 2018). After this, researchers calculated an overall stress score by combining the students' ratings of their chronic stress; this type of measurement made their research reliable because college students experience stress in more than one aspect of their lives (Dalton & Hammen, 2018).

Hubbard et al. (2018) incorporated the SASS and the MSS in their research. The 34-item survey consisted of students' statements expressing how they were feeling, ranging from helplessness to satisfied with their life situation (Hubbard et al., 2018). The students used the self-report to rank items on a 4-point Likert scale where zero meant "not true," one meant "a little true," two meant "mostly true," and three meant "certainly true." Once students completed the SASS, they were asked to disclose if they had any psychological issues, received professional help for said issues, or were currently receiving professional help, in order to better understand mental health in college students as a result of stress and their help seeking-behaviors (Hubbard et al., 2018). Then, the researchers used the 32-item self-report MSS to measure the types of stressors that impact college students the most. These self-report items were created by Hubbard and colleagues through an extensive review of literature on college student stress and mental health and consisted of topics such as problems with roommates and breaking up with a partner. For this research, they asked the students to evaluate each item using a 4-

point Likert scale where zero meant "not at all," one meant "a little," two meant "a lot," and three meant "extremely much" (Hubbard et al., 2018).

Analyses of included studies revealed commonalities between research models and impact factors of college student stress. All twenty sources used in this thesis consisted of quantitative studies. The use of quantitative studies allowed researchers to describe characteristics of college student stress and the impact factors. The most common way stress was studied was through the use of self-report surveys. This trend could potentially be explained by the notion that qualitative studies (e.g., self-report surveys) are more common and reliable due to the use of questionnaires, interviews, and observations in college students. Self-reports also provide valuable insight to students' own perceptions of their stress levels.

**Corresponding Strengths and Weaknesses**

Despite similarities across these surveys, there are a few notable differences: while some used self-report measurements, others used more creative approaches including a daily diary, emotion trackers, symptom trackers, and technology such as pulse and heart rate monitoring. Eisenbarth (2019) described the use of self-report surveys as a limitation to his research, stating that self-report surveys created a bigger risk for possible participant bias. This was attributed to the fact the men may be more likely to withhold an admission to help-seeking behaviors and women may be self-conscious to report in fear of their answers not aligning with how others perceive them (Eisenbarth, 2019).

Griffin et al. (2020) identified participant withdrawal and lack of available materials as limitations in their study. From the beginning, Griffin and colleagues had a

difficult time gathering participants for their study and, once they had participants, some

participants withdrew from the study. Only a small number of students ultimately

completed the entire study, which meant the results of the study only represented a small

number of college students. Griffin et al. (2020) recommend future researchers

emphasize the importance of time management and dedication to participants to lower

the risk of future withdrawal. Holinka (2015) revealed that her biggest limitation was the

range of scores produced on the EQ-I:s. She found that even though the standard mean

for the EQ-I:s is 100, her sample only ranged from 65 to 88, which means there was a

major range restriction. Because of this restriction, none of her participants had high

scores of emotional intelligence; this has the potential to make results unreliable because

there are no true low and high groups, which is a concern due to the fact that her

findings may not accurately represent college students (Holinka, 2015).

Dalton and Hammen (2018) used a daily diary to measure college student stress,

which they list as a limitation to their research. This limitation is due to the fact that

even though a daily diary allows college students to consistently assess changes in

stress, behaviors, and the effect stress has, it does not provide precise timing of when

stress occurs between daily stressors and less frequent ones. However, it is important to

note that with extensive, hands-on review, researchers should be able to distinguish

which stressors occur more often than others, but that would require researchers to

closely review the diaries multiple times.

The remaining articles had a common limitation: the use of self-report surveys

(Acharya et al., 2018; Eisenbarth, 2019; Holinka, 2015; Hubbard et al., 2018; Jones et

al., 2018; Karaman et al., 2019; Kearns & Gardiner, 2007; Reddy et al., 2014; Stagman,

2011). The authors generally claim that by relying on self-report data from college students, they are increasing their risk for response bias. Thus, college students may be less likely to admit the truth on their surveys if they participate in the same study as peers, think the researchers may repeat the information, or students may withhold information they are too prideful to admit. Even though various measurements were used in the research studies included, each study found very similar factors that influence college student stress the most: academics, family and peer relationships, jobs, and self-expectations.
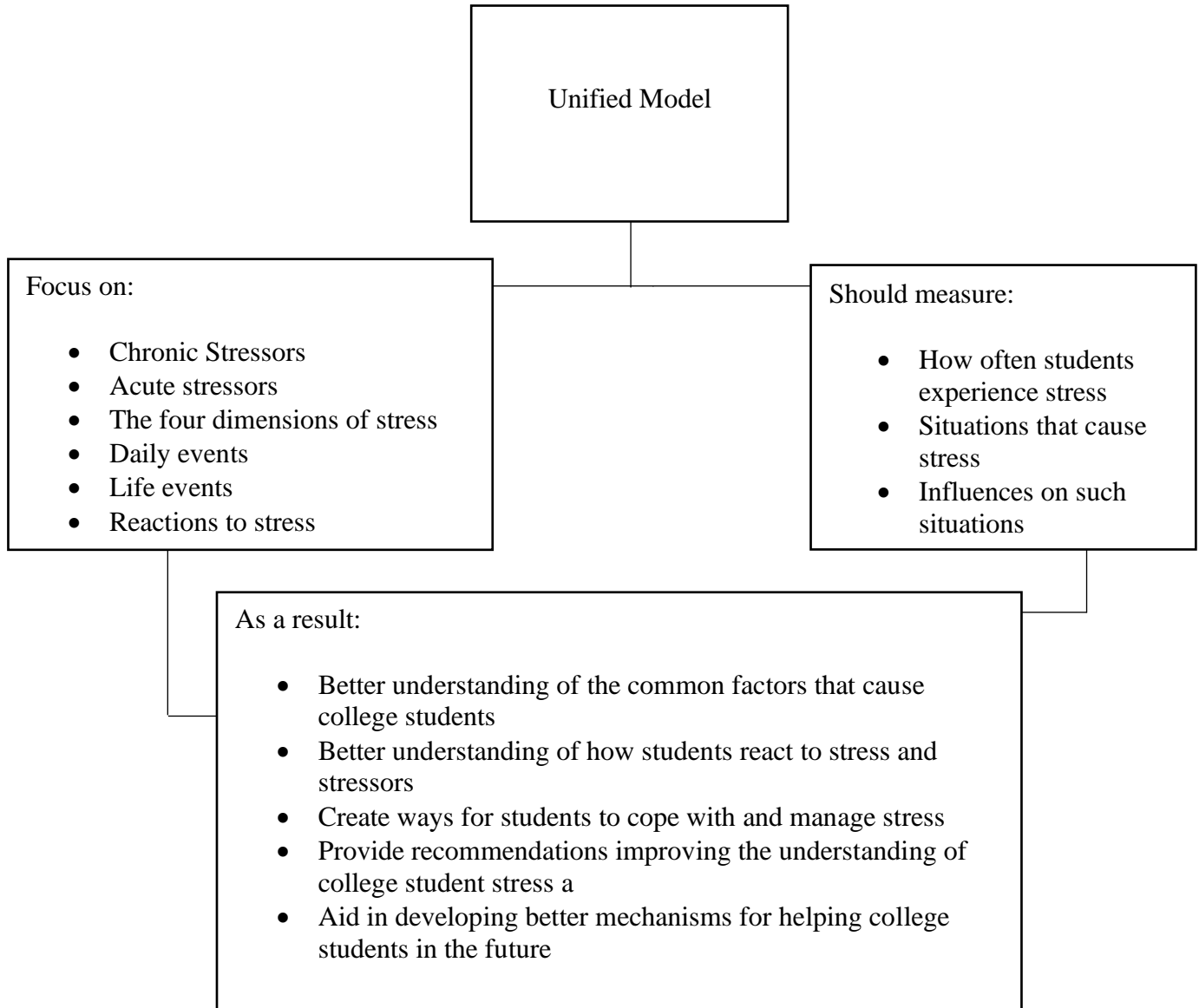
**Analysis of Methods and Metrics Employed**

In order to best identify stressors and understand stress among college students, current research included in this thesis used self-report surveys. Self-report surveys are easy to conduct, typically consist of questionnaires, and have the ability to be designed to suit the needs of the researcher (Epel et al., 2018). In the literature analyzed for this thesis, a majority of researchers utilized self-report surveys. Even though some identify self-report surveys as a possible limitation, using self-reports can be advantageous. As a result of self-report surveys, researchers were able to gather information on different types of stressors instead of focusing on items they theorized to be stressors. This is important because one of the biggest issues when it comes to understanding and creating a unified model for college student stress is the fact that there are a multitude of factors that impact it.

Results of the current study revealed college students all experience the four dimensions of stress; however, all students experience these dimensions differently. Accordingly, a unified model of stress is recommended in order to better identify college students' most common stressors and determine when they occur. The unified model should focus on chronic and acute stressors, or the four dimensions of stress, daily events, life events, and reactions to stress. The model should measure how often students experience feelings and situations that result in stress as well as what influences them. This way they have a unified and better understanding of the common factors that cause college students stress as well as how they tend to react to stress in order to better create ways for them to cope and deal with it. These analyses could provide recommendations for both improving the understanding of college student stress and developing better

mechanisms for supporting college students. To this end, a unified model of stress is

recommended (see Figure 1), which provides an avenue for researchers to gather

information on college student stress and the factors that influence it.

*Figure 1*

*Blueprint for Stress Measurement*

```
                        ┌─────────────────────┐
                        │                     │
                        │    Unified Model    │
                        │                     │
                        └─────────────────────┘
```

**Focus on:**

- Chronic Stressors
- Acute stressors
- The four dimensions of stress
- Daily events
- Life events
- Reactions to stress

**Should measure:**

- How often students experience stress
- Situations that cause stress
- Influences on such situations

**As a result:**

- Better understanding of the common factors that cause college students
- Better understanding of how students react to stress and stressors
- Create ways for students to cope with and manage stress
- Provide recommendations improving the understanding of college student stress a
- Aid in developing better mechanisms for helping college students in the future

**Limitations**

There are always limitations in research; it is important to acknowledge them and provide recommendations. Thus, prior to providing suggestions for future research, limitations will first be examined. In the present study, EBSCOhost was used as the main database, and the search did not incorporate any other databases. While EBSCOhost was an appropriate search engine for research of this nature, future research should incorporate multiple databases to conduct searches to ensure all relevant literature is included.

Further, this review only included twenty articles based upon inclusion criteria. The inclusion criteria limited the amount of information available to aid in the literature review. While this is important to ensure that information is up-to-date, the review may be unintentionally excluding information that could have aided in the study's findings. Future research should consider expanding the inclusion criteria to critically analyze trends in research across decades and include more sources for a more comprehensive view of the literature.

Additionally, studies included in analyses examined the stress of college students across all years in school. This examination was intentional in order to capture stressors that all students face. However, future research could specifically examine unique stressors experienced by students across different years (e.g., freshman vs. junior year). Such research could help determine whether students face unique stressors as they advance through their academic careers, which could inform strategies for supporting students as they navigate stress.

**Discussion and Recommendations**

The most salient finding from this study is that there is no unified model for stress. The present study recommends creating a unified model, as displayed in Figure 1, that (a) incorporates predominant factors that influence stress such as finances, academics, and personal life, (b) addresses how college students react to stress such as substance use, time management, and mental health and (c) represents how often stress is experienced. With such a model in mind, future researchers will be able to more seamlessly study college student stress and more easily discover what factors most impact student stress and what drives these factors. The current models used to study college student stress are scattered, but analyses of these models assisted in identifying a way to create a more unified model by using the common factors that influence college student stress, which are placed into four categories: interpersonal stress, intrapersonal stress, academic stress, and environmental stress (Epel et al., 2018; Hubbard et al., 2018; Musabiq & Karimah, 2020; Nonis et al., 1998). Therefore, based on this review of literature, the following elements should be present in a unified model: (a) a focus on chronic and acute stressors, the four dimensions of stress, daily and life events, and reactions to stress and (b) a measurement of how often students experience stress, situations that cause stress, and what influences such stress. With this, researchers have a unified and better understanding of the common factors that cause college students stress as well as how students tend to react to stress in order to better create ways for them to cope and deal with it.

Understanding college student stress is critical to developing effective resources to help students cope with stress, prepare for stress, and alleviate stress. As shown by

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this study's findings, stress can adversely impact students in many ways. College student stress is a common topic which many people recognize, but few deeply understand. People know stress exists, but the lack of a unified model inhibits the more comprehensive understanding needed to truly prepare for and cope with stress. This study was conducted to bring awareness to the outcomes of college student stress and its findings reveal that it is imperative for future research on college student stress to develop a more unified model of stress. As a result, those in higher education will be better educated and equipped to prepare students for stress and help them mitigate the impacts of stress.

Finally, it should be recognized that the global Coronavirus (COVID-19) pandemic could have drastically impacted college student stress. The emergence of COVID-19 provides new opportunities upon which researchers should explore student stress. Stress has potentially increased due to universities transitioning into an online format, which has caused a majority of classes to be online (Son et al., 2020). Researchers have found that online classes can cause students to feel as if they are teaching themselves and fall behind in their work. Having to manage time for class outside of a classroom while balancing work and home life can be stressful for students because online classes often have more assignments, exams, and expectations (Son et al., 2020). It is important to mention that the studies included in the analyses were conducted prior to the COVID-19 epidemic. Future research should examine the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on student stress, as it has potentially led to student burnout, lower grades, and other adverse impacts.

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# APPENDIX A: ANALYZED WORKS

| Article | Scope | N | Stress Measure | Impact Factors | Findings |
|---------|-------|---|----------------|----------------|----------|
| Acharya et al. (2018) | Factors that impact stress in college students. | 631 | Student Stress Survey, the CES-D scale, and demographics. | Immediate surroundings, life experiences, and resultant stressors. | Eight stressors were found to be the main factors contributing to college student stress: depression-like symptoms, gender, domestic status, change in social activities, work with people you do not know, change in sleeping habits, change in eating habits, increased class workload. |
| Bhujade (2017) | Analyzed previous research on college student stress and what impacts college student stress. | 125 | The General Health Questionnaire (GHQ) | Abrupt change in environment, separation from home, fear of academic failure, and fatigue. | Results revealed that living away from family, heavy course loads, and inefficiency in higher education programs cause high levels of stress in college students. |
| Dalton and Hammen (2018) | Examined the relative and interactive effects of stress and depression-like symptoms on health behaviors in college students. | 127 | The UCLA Life Stress Interview (UCLA LSI) | Academic performance, pressure to succeed, future plans, and financial situation. | Results revealed that depression-like symptoms, chronic stress, and daily stress were significantly tied to poor health behaviors in college students as a result of stressors from day-to-day activities. |

| Eisenbarth (2019) | Studied the role gender differences have in college students' stress. | 409 | Cohen's Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) | Academics, finances, family problems, and health issues. | Results revealed that female college students tend to experience higher levels of stress than male college students, and that female college students are more likely to use denial and self-blame coping strategies to deal with stress and the factors that influence stress. |
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| Goldman and Wong (1997) | Examined the relationship between stress, gender, and college students' self-perceptions. | 167 | The Neemann-Harter Self Perception Profile for College Students. | New roles as a college student, self-expectations, family relationships, friendships, and academic performance. | Results revealed that stress negatively affects college students' self-perceptions and that gender differences play a factor as well. |
| Griffin et al. (2020) | Considered biofeedback and researched if it was an effective tool for decreasing college student stress and anxiety while increasing coping abilities. | 7 | The Heart Math Inner Balance device. | Demands of college life, ability to self-regulate stressors, course load, physical health, and mental health. | Results revealed that even with high levels of stress, college students can reduce the effects of stress through the use of the Heart Math Inner Balance Device. |
| Holinka (2015) | Examined the relationship between stress, life satisfaction, and emotional intelligence. | 144 | Cohens Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), SWLS, and EQ-I:s. | Grades, future plans, deadlines and demands, change in eating habits, vacations, change in sleeping habits, and new responsibilities. | Results revealed there is a negative correlation between stress and life satisfaction in college students. |

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| Hubbard et al. (2018) | Sought a better understanding of stressors in college students and how they affect mental health and help-seeking behaviors in college students. | 564 | Online survey that inquired information on college student stressors, mental health symptoms, and help-seeking behaviors, | Academics, finances, intimate relationships, and sleep problems. | Results revealed interpersonal and intrapersonal stress in college students cause anxiety and depression in male and female college students and performance stress causes anxiety and depression and women. |
| Jones et al. (2018) | Examined academic stress, financial stress, and family and peer relationships as stressors for college students | 80,509 | The Standardized Data (SDS); CCMH, 2017 set | Academics, finances, peer relationships, and family support. | Academic factors, financial factors, and peer and family support are the biggest stressors for college students and are significantly likely to result in anxiety. |
| Karaman et al. (2019) | Sought to discover which stressors are most associated with academic stress in college students. | 307 | Achievement Motivation Inventory, Rotter's Internal-External Scale, and the Student-Life Stress Inventory-Revised. | Academics, sense of loneliness, jobs, family relationships, life goals, social pressure, and course expectations. | Results revealed that academic stress in college students directly affects their life satisfaction, achievement motivation, and locus of control. |
| Kearns and Gardiner (2007) | Examined if college students who manage their time better than others are more effective in their day-to-day lives and feel less stress than others. | 269 | Demographic information | Academic demands, time management, and career goals. | Found that stressors can be lessened with better time management behaviors, finding that time management has a direct effect on stress in college students. |
| Puri et al. (2016) | Assessed whether there is a correlation between stress and stressors when it comes to emotional intelligence in college students. | 300 | The Stress Scale for College Students and the Mangal Emotional Intelligence Inventory. | Learning abilities, forming relationships, decision-making, course load, and career decisions. | Determined that there is a negative correlation between stress and emotional intelligence which has a direct impact on college students. |

| Stagman (2011) | Examined levels of academic stressors in college students as well as their reactions to stressors. | 213 | The Student-Life Stress Inventory. | Academics, time management, goals, and feeling in control. | Results revealed college students who maintain multiple life roles are better at coping with and identifying stressors than those who are less involved and have worse time management skills. |