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**PERCEIVED STRESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION AMONG ACADEMICIANS  
DURING COVID-19 PANDEMIC**

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**ABSTRACT**

*The study aims to investigate the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction among the academicians during lockdown due to COVID-19. This empirical study was undertaken in two cities in South India namely Coimbatore and Ernakulam during the lockdown May 2021. A sample of 159 academicians participated in the study. Data were collected by administering questionnaires through Google forms and analysed with statistical tools. Results showed that there was a moderate negative correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Regression analysis revealed that 16% of the variance in life satisfaction was explained by perceived stress. Stress is inevitable. Academicians should be provided with training to enhance their coping skills.*

**KEYWORDS:** *Cognitive Appraisal, Coping, Life Satisfaction, Perceived Stress, Primary Appraisal, and Secondary Appraisal.*

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**INTRODUCTION**

It started in Huanan seafood market in Wuhan, China. Someone was infected with a virus from an animal in late 2019. The rest is history. COVID-19 pandemic has killed about 3, 445, 222 people so far.

A laboratory in India confirmed corona virus infection in a Kerala student who returned from Wuhan on 30<sup>th</sup> January 2020. World Health Organization on 31<sup>st</sup> January 2020 reported that National Institute of Virology, Pune has tested 49 samples. Among these 48 were negative.

Twelve additional laboratories started functioning. The Prime Minister's Office (PMO) and the Ministry of Health, Family and Welfare (MoHFW) were monitoring the situation closely.

World Health Organization on 28<sup>th</sup> February 2020 in its Situation Update Report - 5 stated that in Kerala, out of the total 444 samples 3 were tested positive, 436 were negative and results of 5 were pending. Awareness and communication activities were intensified to sensitize the public. WHO Country Office (WCO) India and UNICEF were supporting MoHFW in the fight against corona.

As a proactive response, lockdown was imposed initially for a period of 21 days with effect from 25<sup>th</sup> March, 2020 for containment of corona epidemic in the country. On 26<sup>th</sup> April 2020, there were a total of 26917 confirmed cases and 826 deaths (WHO Situation Update Report -13) and 10<sup>th</sup> May 62939 cases and 2109 deaths (WHO Situation Update Report – 15). WHO Country Office for India (WCO) collaborated with MoHFW on surveillance, tracing contacts, diagnosis, risk communications, hospital preparedness, infection prevention and control etc. Lock down was extended. The total numbers of positive cases including deaths were 1, 89,273 on May 31, 2020. Daily infections decreased to fewer than 20000 during January 2021 from a peak of over ninety thousand in September 2020. A false sense of normalcy prevailed for some time. People didn't take steps to prevent the second wave.

The second wave which is mainly attributed to B.1.1.7 variant is spreading much faster. During the second week of May 2021 around 3 lakh daily infections were reported. There is a chronic shortage of hospital beds. There appears to be a lack of coordination in the supply of oxygen and vital drugs. On 19<sup>th</sup> May 2021 the total number of corona virus confirmed cases was 25228996 and the number of deaths was 278719 (WHO Situation Update Report – 68).

The outbreak of corona virus disease (COVID-19), appears to be stressful for people. According to Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, this stress can include fear and worry about one's own health and the health of loved ones, changes in eating patterns, changes in sleeping patterns, difficulty concentrating, worsening of chronic health problems, worsening of mental health conditions, substance abuse etc. Individuals react differently to stressful situations.

Life events and situations may cause an individual feel stressed. When an individual perceives a situation as stressful, he or she seeks coping strategies to manage stress. As Cohen et al (1983) explained, "When someone experiences chronic stress or uses unsuccessful coping strategies, he or she may begin to feel that life in general is unpredictable, uncontrollable, or overloaded. This global appraisal of life is called perceived stress". According to Cohen & Williamson (1988) all the events and activities of daily life contribute to perceived stress. Perceived stress is influenced by how effectively an individual adapted or coped with all of the situational stress he or she has recently faced.

Life satisfaction is our overall feeling about our life. According to Ruut Veenhoven (1996), "Life satisfaction is the degree to which a person positively evaluates the overall quality of his/her life as a whole. In other words, how much the person likes the life he/she leads". Coffman and Gilligan (2003) defined life satisfaction as "a mental process in which people appraise their satisfaction with their life by comparing their life with a set of standards". There are multiple factors that contribute to life satisfaction including work, romantic relationships, relationships with family and friends, personal development, health and wellness, etc.

Studies conducted by Strine et al. (2008) have shown that life satisfaction is highly related with health variables like illness, sleeping difficulties, obesity, pain, anxiety etc. Satisfied people are prone to be happier and treat others better. They tend to deal with the problems of

work life effectively (Pasupuleti, et al., 2009). A study conducted at Chapman University concluded that life satisfaction is associated with low risk of mortality. Studies have shown that low levels of life satisfaction have been related to adjustment problems including risk for suicide (Choi, 2012). Numbers of studies have shown that perceived stress will have an impact on life satisfaction. The present study aims at assessing the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction among the lecturers during COVID-19 lock down period.

## **REVIEW OF LITERATURE**

A theory of stress and coping was developed by Lazarus and Folkman (1984). Events alone do not activate negative reactions in individuals. It is a two-way process. Individuals interact with their environment. Stress can affect individuals' only when they perceive a situation as stressful. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) developed the concept of cognitive appraisal to explain the process. Stress results from two appraisals. The process by which individuals evaluate situations as negative, neutral, or positive in its implications is called Primary appraisal. Then in secondary appraisal individuals evaluate whether their coping resources are adequate or inadequate. Stressors can affect individuals' wellbeing only when they perceive a situation as stressful and perceive that their resources are inadequate to handle the situation.

Previous research studies have shown the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Alleyne Mary et al. (2010) in their study measured life satisfaction and perceived stress among undergraduate university students in Barbados. 172 students participated in the study. Questionnaires were used for data collection. Results showed that higher levels of perceived stress were associated with lower levels of satisfaction with life. Researchers concluded that living environment, campus facilities, and perceived stress were the major predictors of life satisfaction among these students.

Abolghasemi and Taklavi Varaniyab (2010) examined the relationship among *resilience*, *perceived stress* and life satisfaction among students. The sample consisted of 110 students enrolled in ten high schools in Ardabili, Iran. Data were collected by administering *Resilience Scale*, *Perceived Stress Scale* and *Life Satisfaction Scale*. The results showed that resilience and perceived positive stress are positively related to life satisfaction. Perceived negative stress is negatively related to life satisfaction. Regression analysis revealed that perceived stress explained 49 per cent of variance in life satisfaction.

HiraAbbas, and Muhammad Waseem Shah (2017) examined the relationship between perceived stress, life satisfaction and self-esteem among women facing domestic violence. It was a correlational study in which eighty women participated. Purposive sampling technique was used for data collection. Perceived Stress Scale, Satisfaction with Life Scale, and Rosenberg Self-esteem Scale were administered to collect data. A weak negative relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction was found. Regression analysis revealed that 16 per cent of the variance in life satisfaction was explained by perceived stress.

Tax XinHui and Umar Bin MohdRamzan (2017) in a study investigated the relationship between stress and life satisfaction among medical students. 242 students participated in the study. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. The measures consisted of demographic characteristics, Quality of Life Enjoyment and Satisfaction Scale, and Perceived Stress Scale. Results showed a significant negative correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction.

## **METHOD**

The present study is a descriptive study that seeks to assess the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction among the academicians. A sample of 159 academicians working in Coimbatore in Tamil Nadu and Ernakulam in Kerala state participated in the study. Structured questionnaires were used for data collection. Demographic factors were collected that include age, gender, monthly income, and marital status. Perceived Stress Scale developed by Sheldon Cohen (1983) was used for assessing stress among academicians. This is the most widely used tool for assessing the perception of stress. It measures the extent to which situations in one's life are perceived as stressful. It also has direct questions on current levels of experienced stress. Responses were scored on a 5-point scale, with Never = 0, Almost Never = 1, Sometimes = 2, fairly often = 3, and Very often = 4. Stress scores were obtained by reversing responses to the four positively stated items (items 4, 5, 7, & 8) and then summing across all scale items. Life satisfaction was assessed by administering the scale developed by Ed Diener. Responses were scored on a 5-point scale, with 1= Strongly Disagree, 2=Disagree, 3=Neither Agree nor Disagree, 4=Agree, and 5=Strongly Agree. The collected data were analyzed with SPSS and results were discussed.

## RESULTS

**TABLE 1: MEAN, STANDARD DEVIATION AND ANOVA OF PERCEIVED STRESS AND LIFE SATISFACTION.**

Demographic Characteristics	Groups	N	Perceived Stress (Mean & SD)		Life Satisfaction (Mean & SD)	
Age (in years)	30 & Below	36	19.58 & 5.30	F=7.97 p<.01	15.13 & 3.20	F=4.90 p<.01
	31-40	54	17.59 & 6.03		17.27 & 3.94	
	41-50	33	13.15 & 7.20		18.24 & 3.98	
	Above 50	36	14.27 & 6.75		17.77 & 3.42	
Gender	Male	108	15.83 & 6.90	F=2.17 p>.05	17.50 & 3.99	F=0.08 p>.05
	Female	51	17.50 & 6.19		17.23 & 3.46	
Marital status	Married	118	15.98 & 6.68	F=1.53 p>.05	17.62 & 3.70	F=8.91 p<.01
	Single	41	17.48 & 6.73		15.60 & 3.79	
Income (in rupees)	Below 30000	42	18.52 & 5.87	F=3.51 p<.05	14.64 & 3.02	F=14.34 p<.01
	30000-60000	39	14.74 & 6.99		18.43 & 3.69	
	Above 60000	78	16.02 & 6.77		17.76 & 3.69	

Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was conducted to study the differences in the variables in different groups. ANOVA results showed that there were significant differences in perceived stress ( $F = 7.97$  &  $p < 0.01$ ) and also life satisfaction ( $F = 4.90$  &  $p < 0.01$ ) among different age groups. 30 & Below age group had the highest level of perceived stress (Mean = 19.58) and the lowest level of life satisfaction (Mean = 15.13). 41-50 age group had the lowest level of perceived stress (Mean = 13.15) and the highest level of life satisfaction (Mean = 18.24). Female respondents had a higher level of perceived stress (Mean = 17.50) and a slightly lower level of life satisfaction (Mean = 17.23). A higher level of perceived stress (Mean = 17.48) and a lower level of life satisfaction (Mean = 15.60) were observed among Unmarried respondents. Below 30000 rupees income group had the highest level of perceived stress (Mean = 18.52) and the lowest level of life satisfaction (Mean = 14.64). There were significant differences in perceived stress ( $F = 3.51$  &  $p < 0.05$ ) and also life satisfaction ( $F = 14.34$  &  $p < 0.01$ ) among different income groups.

A Pearson product-moment correlation coefficient was calculated to assess the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction. Results showed that there was a moderate negative correlation between the variables ( $r = -0.407$  &  $p = 0.000$ ).

**TABLE 2: REGRESSION ANALYSIS**

	Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Significance
	B	Std.error	$\beta$		
Constant	20.896	.734		28.484	.000
Perceived Stress	-.231	.041	-.407	-5.580	.000
R	.407				
R2	.166				
F	31.139**				

\*\* 0.01 level

Regression analysis was conducted to assess the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction. In this test, perceived stress was negative and significant in predicting life satisfaction ( $\beta = -0.407$ ;  $p = 0.000$ ). The R2 of this model was 0.166, meaning that 16.6 per cent of the variance in life satisfaction was explained by perceived stress.

## DISCUSSION

The aim of the study was to investigate the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction among academicians during COVID-19 pandemic. The study concluded that there was a negative correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction. This result is consistent with number of other studies like Tax XinHui and Umar Bin MohdRamzan (2017). Previous studies like Hamarat et al. (2002), Alleyne Mary, PhilmoreAlleyne, and Dion Greenidge (2010), Abolghasemi and Varaniyab (2010), Cho and Kim (2014), Yang and Kim (2016), Hira Abbas, Tax XinHui and Umar Bin MohdRamzan (2017) and Muhammad Waseem Shah (2017) concluded that perceived stress was a significant predictor of life satisfaction. The findings of the current study were consistent with the findings of these studies.

The findings of the current study revealed that there were significant differences in perceived stress among different age, marital status, and income groups. In a study conducted by Patrick R Mullen et al (2018) among school counsellors researchers concluded that perceived stress was negatively related to age. Married people experience less stress than unmarried people (Carlson 2012; Horn et al 2013). High levels of perceived stress were reported by lower income group (Manrui Zhang et al., 2014). The present study also revealed similar results.

The results of the present study showed significant differences in life satisfaction among different age, marital status, and income groups. Life satisfaction changes across life span (Baird et al. 2010). Life satisfaction in married individuals was higher than single ones (Richard E. Lucas, Andrew Clark, Yannis Georgellis, and Ed Diener (2003); Saleh A. Al Khatib (2013); AbidinDaglı&NigahBaysal (2017); Grover, Shawn, and John F. Helliwell (2019). Academicians with lower income have less life satisfaction compared to

academicians with higher income (Boran Toker,2012; AbidinDagh&NigahBaysal 2017).The findings of the present study were consistent with the findings of these earlier studies.

## **CONCLUSION**

Life satisfaction affects our health and wellbeing. Number of factors contributes to life satisfaction. The present study aims at assessing the impact of perceived stress on life satisfaction among the academicians during lock down period. The findings of the study revealed that there was a negative correlation between perceived stress and life satisfaction and that sixteen per cent of the variance in life satisfaction was explained by perceived stress. Younger academicians experienced more stress and lower life satisfaction compared to seniors. Stress is inevitable. It is important to train academicians in stress management techniques. They should understand the link between cognitive appraisals of situations, perception of stress, and their impact on life satisfaction. Training should be provided to academicians to enhance their coping skills. Increased life satisfaction among academicians is essential for improving the quality of higher education.

## **Limitations and suggestions for Future Research**

There were some limitations in this study. The present study was a cross sectional study. Findings may differ if we use a longitudinal approach. A small number of academicians from only two cities participated in the study. The results may not be reflective of academicians in other places. Collecting data from a large number of academicians from a wider area may provide better results. Future research may be conducted to identify the moderating factors that influence the relationship between perceived stress and life satisfaction among academicians.

## **Declaration of Conflicting Interest**

The Authors declare that there is no conflict of interest.

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