

## A multi-cultural study on perceived social support and resilience towards academic stress among international students during covid-19

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### Abstract

The current study aimed to see the correlation of perceived social support in enhancing resilience in international students towards academic stress and COVID-19 stress. Extend to which the coronavirus COVID-19 pandemic is affecting worldwide. This study explores social support and resilience towards academic stress and COVID-19 stress in international students—the sample of 83 International Asian and African students, respectively taken from different Countries and universities. The results revealed a significant effect of perceived social support and resilience towards COVID-19 stress. However, further results showed there was a non-significant relationship between perceived social support, resilience towards academic stress.

**Keywords:** Perceived social support, Resilience, Academic stress, International students, COVID-19.

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## Introduction

In March 2019, the World health organization (WHO) declared the global health pandemic caused by coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2), which is also known as the coronavirus pandemic (COVID-19). This virus was first identified in December 2019 in Wuhan, China. This virus has affected individuals globally as of June 3, 2021, and there have been more than 171 million positive cases and more than 3.69 million confirmed deaths due to COVID-19, which makes it one of the deadliest pandemics in history. In dealing with the transmission of COVID-19, the government around the world has set several rules suggested by WHO, such as physical distancing, protocols for the use of masks, including provisions for working and studying (Schools, Universities) from home through online platforms (work from home & school from home) (Situmorang, 2020, 2022; Mamahit&Situmorang, 2022; Putri et al., 2021). Educational Institutions worldwide started physical learning in the digital sphere of education (Kapasias et al., 2020). Online learning was the possible alternative to keep the learning process going (Adnan & Anwar, 2020).

However, these safety measures can have long-lasting consequences on students' lives, especially for the international students studying and living far from their home Countries during COVID-19 (Cohen et al., 2020). It was suggested to keep social distancing and less social gathering; therefore, most Countries had closed their International and national borders. A complete lockdown was implemented to avoid the worst situations of COVID-19. During this pandemic, many individuals working and students who were abroad were stuck out borders, and mobility for them was difficult. COVID-19 has affected many individuals in different ways, especially economically, socially, and psychologically (Situmorang, 2021a, 2021b). COVID-19 has affected International students' lives in many ways. A sudden shift from conventional learning to online education and classes has brought major changes impacting students' academic performance and stress. Students were affected by different factors that measured their stress levels during the lockdown. According to a survey, 51.4% of students reported disturbances in sleeping habits, daily fitness routines, and social interaction that affected their health (Chaturvedi et al., 2021; Stukalo&Simakhova, 2020).

Studying abroad and transitioning from home to another country is said to be stressful after the honeymoon phase. Students encounter many stressors while abroad, such as academic pressure, stress living away from family, efforts for independence from parents, career-related stress, environmental stressors, etc. International students frequently report that factors such as language barriers, academic styles (Misra et al., 2000), separation from home (Hendrickson et al., 2011), poor social integration, and problems in daily life tasks inhibit their adjustment. According to Meng, Zhu, & Cao (2018), International students in university life have to cope with educational, psychological, and other difficulties in their life. In that case, social support and resilience influence their well-being and contribute to coping strategies and enhance psychological well-being (Yeh & Inose, 2003; Meng, Zhu, & Cao 2018). Social support from family, friends, and others contributes to psychological well-being. Having social networks provides individuals with feelings of self-worth, positive experiences, and a sense of overall well-being (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Research on social support has shown that social support is a crucial resource for coping with distress towards traumatic experiences (Helgeson & Lopez, 2010). Lower levels of social support are strongly related to a higher risk of posttraumatic stress symptoms (Brewin et al., 2000).

Research has shown that a strong support system can promote resilience and help someone manage stress during a difficult time. Social support is "having or perceiving to have close others who can provide help or care, particularly during times of stress" (Eisenberger, 2013; Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2021). According to another study, significant relationships were found among resilience, coping, and social support from family, friends, and from spouses. Results revealed that social support and coping skills partially mediated the relationship between resilience and psychological well-being (Malkoç&Yalçın, 2015). Another study on social support among International students indicates that social support was associated with more outstanding academic and psychological adjustment (Lashari et al., 2018). A strong support system from family and peers can help people manage stress emotionally and practically. Many researchers have indicated the benefits of social support in terms of dealing with many stressors, including psychological stress. Resilience can be conceptualized as a psychological construct that decreases the adverse effects of stressful life events and facilitates adaptation (Wagnild& Young, 1993). Resilience plays a vital role in coping with stress; a person who is high in resilience will cope with stress as compared to one who is low in resilience. Research has shown that resilience does help with enhancing psychological well-being and coping with traumatic events (Li et al., 2021; Ye et al., 2020).

Therefore, the current study aimed to see the correlation of perceived social support in enhancing resilience in students towards academic stress and COVID-19 stress. Pandemic COVID-19 made it difficult for International students' motilities, and utmost students were stuck across borders. Students' complained about their economic, psychological, academic, and social conditions. Previous studies attempted to explore the relationship between social support and resilience among International students. Still, the studies did not present specific environmental stressors such as the COVID-19 pandemic and the effect of such stressors on students' resilience and adjustment during such times. This study will fill the research gap to explore the role of social support and resilience towards academic stress among International students during a pandemic. The research question is "Does Perceived social support Increase resilience towards academic stress and COVID-19 stress among international students during the Covid-19 pandemic?".

## Method

### Research Design

The current study is a quantitative research design with a cross-sectional method. The study will use survey questionnaires to collect the data. The sample for the present study was accidental sample techniques, and participants were International students from Asian and African countries currently studying abroad in more than five countries (Pakistan, Indonesia, Madagascar, Nepal, India, Uganda, and the Philippines).

### Measurements Instruments

The quantitative questionnaires used four measurement scales. Each measuring instrument is adapted to COVID-19 contexts by adding (during the COVID-19 pandemic) at the end of each item to be used according to the COVID-19 context. The instruments are as follows: 1) To measure resilience in International students, we used the 10-item of Connor-Davidson Resilience Scale (Campbell-Sills & Stein, 2007); 2) To measure perceived social support, we used the Multidimensional Perceived Social Support Scale by Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, and Farley (1988); 3) To measure academic stress, we used The Perception of Academic Stress Scale by Bedewy and Gabriel (2015); 4) To measure COVID-19 Stress, we used the 10-item of Perceived Stress Scale (PSS-10) by Campo-Arias, Pedrozo-Cortés, and Pedrozo-Pupo (2020).

### Participants

The participants consisted of 83 International University students from multiple Countries around Asia and Africa; accidental sampling was used by distributing questionnaires on social media platforms. Among these, 47% were male 53% were female. In the age range of 19-36 years old.

### Procedure

The researchers distributed the questionnaires online via Google-form on multiple social media platforms (Facebook, WhatsApp, Twitter, and Instagram) to collect the data. The Statistical analysis of data were demographic descriptive analysis and multiple regression analysis on SPSS. This study has been reviewed by the Ethics Committee of Faculty of Psychology, University of Indonesia. They decided that the study has been in accordance with ethical standards of Psychology discipline, Research Ethics Code of University of Indonesia.

## Results and Discussion

**Table 1.** Detail of sample characteristics for main study (N=83)

Sample characteristics	Categories	<i>f</i>	%
Age	19-36 years	83	100
Gender	Female	44	53
	Male	39	47
Race/ethnicity	Asian	58	69.9
	African	25	30.1
Socioeconomic status	Lower	9	10.8
	Middle	68	81.9
	Upper	6	7.2
Education level	Undergraduates	38	45.8
	Masters	39	47
	PhD	6	7.2

Note: *f* = frequency, % = percentage

Table 1. indicates the total sample (N=83) of the 19-36 years age group consisting of 47% male and 53% female. Majority of the study participants in the present study were of master's level 47%, undergraduates 45.8%, and Ph.D. were 7.2%. The sample includes more Asians, who are 69.9%, and Africans 30.1%. According to the SES, 10.8% were lower SES, 81.9% Middle SES, and 7.2% upper SES.

**Table 2.** The descriptive statistics of the main study variables (N=83)

	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
Academic stress	83	1.78	4.50	3.4672	.52347
Perceived social support	83	1.25	5.00	3.7781	.74732
Resilience	83	2.30	5.00	3.8181	.63729
COVID-19 stress	83	2.10	4.80	3.4506	.52600
Academic expectation	83	4.00	20.00	12.9277	3.48790
Stress for work exam	83	9.00	38.00	27.9759	5.83717
Academics self-perception	83	15.00	29.00	21.5060	3.35455

Table 2. indicates the data was checked for mean and standard deviation in SPSS. This was done by using the statistics of descriptive variables.

**Table 3.** Linear regression analysis for resilience and perceived social support towards student's academic stress (N=83)

Model	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
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Constant		3.080	.442		.613	.000
Perceived social support	Social	22.130	.078	0.11	.006	.995
Resilience		22.469	.091	.123	1.103	.273

$R^2 = 1.23$   
 $\Delta R^2 = .015$

Table 3. shows perceived social support and resilience towards students' academic stress. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .015 indicates that less than 10% variance in the dependent variable, student's academic stress, can be accounted for by the perceived social support and resilience is  $p < .000$ . Perceived social support and resilience have no significant effect on a student's academic stress ( $\beta = -.11$ ,  $p < .000$ ).

**Table 4.** Linear regression analysis for resilience and perceived social support towards student's COVID-19 stress (N=83)

Model	B	SE	$\beta$	t	p
Constant	2.031	.413		4.916	.000
Perceived social support	.078	.073	.110	1.062	.291
Resilience	.298	.086	.357	3.448	.001

$R^2 = .383$   
 $\Delta R^2 = .146$

Table 4. shows perceived social support and resilience towards students' COVID-19 stress. The  $\Delta R^2$  value of .383 indicates that the perceived social support and resilience can account for a 30% variance in the dependent variable; student's COVID-19 stress is  $p < .001$ . Perceived social support and resilience significantly affect students' COVID-19 stress ( $\beta = -.383$ ,  $p < .001$ ). The above graphs indicate the correlation between demographic and study variables: academic stress, COVID-19 stress, perceived social support, and resilience.

The research participants were 83 Asian and African students from different countries. The current study studied the effects of perceived social support and resilience towards academic stress and COVID-19 stress on students. Other than that, some of the demographic variables such as gender and age educational level were also studied.

The study findings indicated a positive significance between perceived social support and resilience towards students' COVID-19 stress. It was found that perceived social support was related to decreased psychological issues such as loneliness and acted as protective factors and increased hope during pandemic COVID-19 (Bareket-Bojmel et al., 2021). Furthermore, the results are consistent with previous studies that perceived social support levels towards resilience to COVID-19 stress (Li et al., 2021).

The study findings found no significance between perceived social support and resilience towards students' academics. Previous research has shown a significant relationship between perceived social support and resilience. However, the current results are non-significant. This could be because of the sample population that causes the results to turn out differently than expected, which is multicultural and International students away from homes during the pandemic. It was concluded that there might be other factors influences that can decrease the level of academic stress towards International students, such as external and internal factors "students' perception about teachers, teachers' behavior, the methodology of the study and financial stability" as emphasized by (Odriozola González et al. 2020). It can decrease students' academic stress during pandemics. Students' encouragement and involvement can also manage academic stress; therefore, students are sought to develop beneficial habits through managing time and to accomplish their goals in academic courses (Khan, Altaf, &Kausar, 2013).

However, these non-significant findings can be implemented for future research in areas of resilience in a larger population of international students from different countries. Therefore these findings can be contrasted with existing theories and previous research to study and focus more on different populations to reconcile these findings, especially after a pandemic. Furthermore, future research can also look for different sets of variables other than social support, such as parental support (Situmorang & Salim, 2021) and resilience

toward academic stress. Secondly, future research is suggested to study a qualitative or experimental study with these variables to have a deeper understanding and recompile the discrepant findings.

## Conclusion

In this study, the obtained findings indicated that the COVID-19 pandemic had made a significant impact on international students' mental health, education, social, and daily routine. The COVID-19 associated disruption is highlighted as the critical challenge and delivers an opening to advance alternate assessment measures for International students and International Study Programs in the context of COVID-19. New policies and recommendations in this area would assist in reducing some of the harmful consequences while also preparing educators and students for the coming health crises.

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