

Research Article

The Mediating Effect of Stress Mindset and Self-Connection on the Relationship between Perceived Stress and Burnout among College Students

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ABSTRACT

Recent research has revealed alarming evidence that college students are experiencing high levels of stress, which correlates to high burnout rates and is linked to numerous undesirable outcomes. The present study examined the possible variable that mediates the relationship between student-perceived stress and school burnout. Specifically, this paper identified the level of perceived stress, stress mindset, self-connection, and personal and school burnout among college students, and determined if stress mindset and self-connection mediated the relationship between perceived stress and school burnout. The paper surveyed Central Luzon State University undergraduate students during the First Semester of AY 2021-2022. Stratified sampling was used in the selection of the respondents with ages ranging from 18 to 20 years old. Initial findings suggest that students' perceived stress level is moderate and they experience high levels of personal and school burnout. Lower scores on stress mindset were also seen in the result, which indicates that students have a stress-debilitating mindset, and thus view stress and its effect negatively. Results also show that they have a slightly high

self-connection. Additionally, the findings from the parallel mediation analysis indicated that perceived stress is directly related to school burnout through its relationship with a stress mindset. In contrast, the findings suggest that self-connection is not a significant mediator of the effect of perceived stress on school burnout. Nonetheless, the results suggest that students may overcome stress by developing an adaptive view of stress and encouraging them to be connected to themselves, thus, in the process, lessening the probable occurrence of burnout.

Keywords: Stress Mindset, Self-connection, Perceived Stress, School Burnout

INTRODUCTION

Attending the university is both a rewarding and overwhelming experience. Empirical evidence proposes that being a student results in a stressful experience (Stallman & Hurst, 2016), and remarkable evidence points to burnout in the educational setting (Norez, 2017). Students also experience numerous sources of stress aside from academic pressures and demands. Other sources include finances or debt, familial issues, lack of social support, marital relationships, and other interpersonal problems and discrimination (El-Ghoroury et al., 2012).

According to the study by Austria-Cruz (2019), college students from private and public schools in Central Luzon experienced significant stress manifested through difficulty in sleeping, low self-confidence, and moodiness. Medical students develop significant stress and burnout during preclinical medical education and continue into clinical years (Fares et al., 2016). The common effects of stress on students are sleeplessness, being irritable, and being moody. Male participants tend to use computers to cope, while female respondents call on prayer to God to ease their stress (Mazo, 2015).

Notably, high rates of burnout among college students are an increasing concern of educators nowadays. Some solutions and interventions to reduce stress have been employed, yet the results are temporary and produce moderate effectiveness (Stults-Kolehmainen & Sinha, 2014; Werner-Seidler et al., 2017; Lattie et al., 2019; Feiss et al., 2019). A longitudinal intervention is needed to prepare the students to handle a higher level of stress about future work-related and adulting concerns (Dyrbye et al., 2017; Daya & Hearn, 2018; Klussman et al., 2020).

In connection with this, the current study aims to investigate a potential factor that mediates the association between student perceived stress and school burnout. According to Klussman et al. (2020), stress mindset and self-connection are thought to improve students' stress resilience, which may prevent them from becoming burned out. Stress mindset and self-connection may work together in protecting students from burning out because those who have high levels of

connection to self are in tune with their values and goals. They can view stressful situations and experiences as facilitating their work towards meaningful goals rather than as harmful and debilitating (Klussman et al., 2020). It is also found that these two individual variables are known to protect an individual from the possible harmful impact of stress (Klussman, et al., 2020; Crum et al., 2013). It would thus, be interesting to combine stress mindset and self-connection to predict stress outcomes.

Perceived Stress and Burnout

Stress is any event or circumstance that threatens an individual's capacity to cope (Blona, 2012). It is inevitable, and it springs everywhere. Stress is practically a part of every human being and experiences it on a daily basis. No one is free from it, and it affects individuals despite their developmental stage (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2016). Unlike stress which may be evident in all facets of one's life, burnout results from excessive stress that impacts psychological well-being and manifests through feelings of helplessness, emotional fatigue, and difficulty coping with life challenges (Maslach, 1982).

According to the findings of Bate et al. (2019), academic requirements are the leading source of stress for college students in state universities, followed by financial concerns. In the Philippines, most undergraduate students have been exposed to episodes of difficulty and poverty (Mina & Imai, 2016 & Figueroa et al., 2016) and have become acclimated to periodic financial insecurity. As a result, compared with academics, Philippine undergraduate students may perceive this as a lesser threat, and it is thus ranked as the second leading cause of stress. Emotional concerns come close to financial-related problems, and social stressors proved to be the least stressor (Bate et al., 2019). Achieving high grades and personal inclination for academic self-actualization also contribute to students' stress (Austria-Cruz, 2019). The pressure to succeed and post-graduation plans are also a top concern (Beiter et al., 2015). Transferees, Junior and Senior students, and those living off-campus were shown to demographically experience the most stress, anxiety, and depression (Beiter et al., 2015).

Furthermore, individuals who struggle to cope with stress and experience stress constantly for a long period of time may experience burnout episodes (Scott, 2020). As stress progressed to burnout, exhaustion was thought to emerge first due to excessive demands and overload. Negative attitudes toward others and detachment follow. If this process continues, the next stage will be feelings of inadequacy and failure (Maslach, 1982). Numerous mental and physical health problems frequently coexist with burnout. If burnout is not effectively managed, a person may find it challenging to function well in their daily lives.

Perceived Stress, Burnout, and Stress Mindset

Stress mindset and its relation to health and performance have been studied widely (Ben-Avi et al., 2018; Keech et al., 2020). According to Keech and Hamilton (2018), stress mindsets are a cluster of beliefs that individuals hold about the consequences of experiencing stress. People's beliefs about stress and how they respond to it can be a potential factor in an individual's health. According to Fischer et al. (2016), negative stress beliefs result in somatic symptoms, while positive stress increases biological and psychological well-being (Crum et al., 2017).

The literature on stress mindset states that the way individuals perceive stress matters more rather than how much stress they experience (Crum et al., 2013). A stress mindset refers to evaluating the nature of stress itself as enhancing or debilitating. For instance, an individual may view a particular stress (e.g., approaching deadline) as exceedingly stressful but have a stress-enhancing mindset (believing that the experience of stress will ultimately have an enhancing result). In contrast, a person may also evaluate the approaching deadline as highly stressful but may have a stress-debilitating mindset—expecting the stressor to weaken health and vitality. Likewise, a person with a debilitating stress mindset tries to avoid the stress to avert debilitating outcomes.

On the other hand, a person who has a stress-enhancing mindset accepts and uses stress to enhance outcomes. Suppose a person has a debilitating stress mindset. In that case, that person will tend to take appropriate actions and behaviors to avoid stress to prevent debilitating outcomes from happening (Horiuchi et al., 2018). When stress is actively utilized toward enhancing ends, the person will tend to take appropriate actions that help meet the demand, value, or goal underlying the stressful situation (Ben-Avi et al., 2018). Cognizant of this, changing the student's stress mindset can help them deal with stress effectively.

Moreover, stress mindset was found to be related to both personal and school-related burnout. The nature of these relationships suggested that the more an individual views stress as debilitating, the more personal and school-related burnout they experienced. Additionally, having an adaptive mindset may trigger a cycle in which difficult situations are repeatedly confronted with adaptive coping mechanisms, which results in successful outcomes and reinforces the adaptive mindset (Klussman et al., 2020). Thus, this explains why having an adaptive stress mindset is related to burnout. That is, individuals who have an adaptive mindset (stress-enhancing mindset) may see potentially stressful situations as opportunities for growth rather than as occurrences that would have a negative impact on them. As a result, these people might be more motivated to exert effort and use adaptive coping mechanisms in reaction to potentially stressful situations.

Perceived Stress and Burnout and Self-connection

Research suggests that the extent to which one feels self-connected is positively related to various well-being indicators (Kyoung et al., 2018; Kabz, 2016 & Cherry, 2020). Self-connection is considered a notable factor in enhancing stress resilience. Through self-connection, students may protect themselves from stress because of increased self-awareness, self-acceptance, and behavioral alignment (Klussman et al., 2020). Self-awareness is defined as "knowing one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions" (Goleman, 1995), while self-acceptance is the complete acceptance of one's internal states, preferences, resources, and intuitions. Acceptance consists of receptiveness and openness to oneself rather than denial. It is adaptive to encourage people to discover more about themselves while being comfortable aligning their behavior with themselves (Bernard, 2015). An individual will not attain a connection to self if one of these components is absent (Klussman et al., 2020).

People who have a strong sense of self-connection are less likely to engage with unproductive potential stressors (Klussman et al., 2020) because they have a firm understanding of who they are and what they stand for, they are skilled at filtering the potentially stressful life and events with which they will engage. Therefore, if a potentially stressful event occurs, a person who is highly self-connected may not even choose to engage in it or make an effort to cope with it if they do not see it as consistent with their core values and goals.

Theoretical Framework

Over the years, several models and theories have been proposed to characterize the complex construct of stress (Goldstein & Kopin, 2007; Koolhaas et al., 2011; Wheaton et al., 2013). One influential model is the Stress Process Model by Pearlin et al. (1981) which suggests that different amounts of stress might lead to more mental health problems. The Stress Process Model has been used as a basis for understanding the relationship between stress and burnout as well as the association between stress and depression (Hish et al., 2019). Three fundamental elements form the stress process: stressors (e.g., life events, chronic stressors), mediators -personal resources, including conceptions of self (e.g., self-esteem, self-competence, mastery, self-efficacy), and social support. They serve as protective factors that buffer the negative impact of stress on the individual. Finally, the last element is the stress outcome. Overall, the stress process model has garnered substantial empirical support and has been applied across a wide range of studies.

Despite its importance in elucidating the mechanisms that relate stressors to health outcomes, the current study suggests that other psychological internal factors can operate as mediators. Self-connection and stress mindset are two mediators proposed in this research to buffer the impacts of stress on a person's

psychological condition, specifically burnout. The lack of research on the buffering effect of these psychological internal factors is a critical gap in the stress process literature that must be filled in order to completely understand how stress affects people's mental health.

The Stress Mindset Theory suggests that positive stress beliefs lead to positive and not negative results when exposed to stressors (Crum et al., 2013). Moreover, stress mindset refers to the evaluation of the nature of stress itself as enhancing and debilitating. Theories suggest that the mindset of an individual in adapting to a stressful situation is the critical factor to determine whether stress will have debilitating or enhancing effects on individuals (Crum et al., 2013). The stress mindset is anticipated to be an additional variable that influences stress response, reducing the negative impact of stress.

Meanwhile, Self-connection is believed to be a vital contributor to an individual's quality of life, hence a probable factor in stress resilience (Klussman et al., 2020). Self-connection in conceptualization is the sense of connection that is related to the perceived self. It refers to the presence and relationship between three dimensions: (1) an awareness of oneself, (2) an acceptance of oneself based on this awareness, and (3) an alignment of one's behaviors with this awareness. These three components are interrelated in non-hierarchical structure and contribute mainly to experiencing self-connection. As such, an individual lacking in any of the three components would experience less overall self-connection.

People need to be aware of themselves, accept what they know about themselves, and act in alignment with that knowledge. It is conceptualized that these domains are distinct yet interrelated to each other. Each domain is essential in itself. Thus, all three define self-connection.

The impact of perceived stress is mediated by Stress Mindset and Self-connection, thus protecting an individual from burnout experience. Stress can be viewed differently depending on the mindset of an individual. Some view it as beneficial (enhancing), while others might view it as harmful (debilitating). Notably, self-connection also reduces stress because it leads an individual to pursue meaningful goals that contribute to a fulfilling quality of life. Moreover, stress mindset and self-connection might facilitate lessening the occurrence of burnout experience among students. Individuals who are highly self-connected focus on their goals and values that have a meaningful impact on their lives. They can perceive a stressful experience as an avenue toward life-fulfilling goals rather than as debilitating or destructive (Klussman et al., 2020).

Research Objectives

The present study examined the possible variable that mediates the relationship between student-perceived stress and school burnout. Specifically, it aimed at answering the following research objectives: a) to know the level of

perceived stress, personal and school burnout, stress mindset, and self-connection, among college students; b) to determine if stress mindset and self-connection mediate the relationship between perceived stress and school burnout.

METHODS

Research Design

Non-experimental Design (Stone-Romero & Rosopa, 2010) that looks into a series of causation as a principle of mediation was also used in the study.

Participants

The researcher surveyed Central Luzon State University undergraduate college students who are currently enrolled during the First Semester of AY 2021-2022. Stratified sampling was used in the selection of the respondents. The sample size of the study is eight hundred thirty (830). Students majoring in Education represent 22% of the population, 10% from Business courses, 28% from Psychology majors, 15% from Veterinary Medicine, and 25% from Engineering courses. The age of the respondents ranged from 18 to 20 years old ($M = 20.05$, $SD = 1.16$). The majority of them are female with 69.6%, while 30.4% of them are male. Students with moderate to high stress are included in the study, while students with low stress are not included in the study.

Data Gathering Tools

Stress Mindset Measure (SMM). This eight-item measure was developed by Crum, Salovey, and Achor (2013). Stress mindset was measured using the four-item scale that ranges from 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 4 (Strongly Agree). Higher scores on the SMM represent the mindset that stress is enhancing. The reliability measure from the sample obtained a Cronbach alpha of .71 making the instrument valid and sufficient for the study.

Self-connection Scale (SCS). The SCS measures self-connection based on its three underlying components: awareness, acceptance, and alignment. Participants responded to 12 items measuring self-connection on a scale of 0 (Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Strongly Agree) developed by Klussman, Nichols, & Langer (2020). Cronbach alpha of .80 was acquired from the sample, which makes the instrument valid for the study.

Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The perceived stress scale is the most widely used psychological instrument for measuring the perception of stress. It is originally developed by Cohen, Kamarck & Mermelstein (1983). The scale contains ten items with a value of 0 (Never) to 4 (Very Often). The scale exhibited a good

internal consistency which reflects an acceptable measure of stress with Cronbach's α of .79 acquired from the sample.

Burnout. The Copenhagen Burnout Inventory has three domains: personal burnout, work-related burnout, and client-related burnout. The scale can be used with either one or two dimensions of the scale in a particular study depending on its purpose and population. The reliability measure of the sample acquired .87 Cronbach alpha for personal burnout items while .86 was obtained for school-related burnout items which implied that both scales are sufficient and valid measures in the study. These items were adapted from Kristensen et al. (2005) and focused on school rather than work. Both scales include five response options that range from 0 (Never/Almost never or to a very low degree) to 100 (Always or to a very high degree). Higher mean scores result in a higher burnout experience.

The total scores for personal burnout and school-related burnout were computed separately and described under the first research problem of the current study. However, only the scores on the school-related burnout scale were used in the mediation analysis.

Data Gathering Procedures

Due to restrictions caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, the researcher did the data-gathering using an online system, specifically Google Forms. The researcher asked the help of her co-faculty members to disseminate the link to the questionnaire. Faculty members do not have access to view or edit the questionnaire's content along with the respondent's information. They are only responsible for sharing the link with their students. Student participation in the study has no equivalent incentive and does not affect their class standing. It was purely voluntary.

Ethical Consideration

The following ethical considerations were taken throughout the research process:

a) *Approval from the Ethics Review Committee.* The current study underwent the process of review by the registered Ethics Review Committee with a protocol number of SLU-REC-SS 2021-019.

b) *Assurance of the participant's safety and welfare.* They were not subjected to any form of physical or mental harm. When any participant needed psychological assistance while filling out the Google forms, a Registered Guidance Counselor was on standby to help.

c.) *Gathering informed consent from the respondents and ensuring they can withdraw participation anytime they wish.* Withdrawing from this study does not affect students' class standing or place them in any negative academic

consequences. They can withdraw anytime they want. Informed consent was sent via Google Forms, and placed in the first section of the questionnaire; those who agreed with the terms and conditions of the study proceeded in answering the questionnaire.

d.) *Assurance of the confidentiality of their identity and information.* Participants' identities were not exposed in the study. Their information was coded by numbers. Only the researcher has the access to their responses and is kept only in her personal drive.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The study's main goal was to determine if stress mindset and self-connection can mediate the link between perceived stress and school burnout. The current study's findings were presented in this section.

Students' Level of Perceived Stress, Stress Mindset, Self-connection & Burnout

<i>Variable</i>	<i>N</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>Standard Deviation</i>	<i>Description</i>
Perceived Stress	830	24.63	4.84	Moderately stress
Stress Mindset	830	1.38	.51	Stress debilitating mindset
Self-connection	830	4.91	.75	Slightly High Self-connection
Personal Burnout	830	70.78	17.81	High level of Burnout
School Burnout	830	68.95	17.40	High level of Burnout

Student's level of Perceived Stress

Perceived stress levels were measured by how stressful certain situations are in one's life. As shown in the table, the respondents perceived stress level is moderate. This implies that the respondents view their life experiences and undertakings for the past months as stressful. They experienced distress from something that happened unexpectedly. Feelings of nervousness, anger, irritability because of the things that happened outside their control, and inability to cope with the things they do were the manifestation of stress among students. According to the findings of Bate et al. (2019), academic requirements are the leading source of stress for college students in state universities, followed by financial concerns. In the Philippines, most undergraduate students have been exposed to episodes of difficulty and poverty (Mina & Imai, 2016 & Figueroa et al., 2016) and have become acclimated to periodic financial insecurity. As a result, compared with academics, Philippine undergraduate students may perceive this as a lesser threat, and it is thus ranked as the second leading cause of stress. Emotional concerns come

close to financial-related problems, and social stressors proved to be the least stressor (Bate et al., 2019). In addition to these findings, the qualitative study of Cabaguing (2019) revealed that school demands such as examinations and quizzes rank first as the top stressors of students, followed by teacher's and classmate's personalities, school administrators, love life, and sudden makeup classes. Student stress if unmanaged might have a long-term impact on their emotions, how they approach learning, and their psychological well-being (Rodriquez & Hidalgo et al., 2020).

Student's Stress Mindset

The student stress mindset was categorized as stress debilitating mindset and stress enhancing mindset. Students with higher scores indicate that they have a stress-enhancing mindset, which means they view stress and its effects positively, whereas students with lower scores have a stress-debilitating mindset, which indicates that they view the impact of stress negatively. According to the result of the present study, students exhibit a stress-debilitating mindset. This shows that they have a negative attitude toward stress. They feel that stress should be avoided at all costs, and they believe that it will impair their performance and productivity. Some individuals with a stress-debilitating mindset fear it will damage their health and sap their excitement, while others will avoid opportunities or responsibilities that will put them under more stress (Niemiec, 2019). Students have formed the habit of associating stress with undesirable outcomes, which they sometimes refer to as distress (Rudland et al., 2019). Stress is generally perceived as a solely unpleasant sensation (Selna, 2018) because of its severe effects on one's physical, psychological, and social well-being (Gogol & Simm, 2015). Stress has a bad reputation because of its evidence of chronic illness, depression, and early mortality (Parker, 2015). Students develop a bad impression of stress as a result of their negative encounters with it, leading them to believe that it should be avoided at all costs. Student life has been a daunting and challenging season, and stress demands are inevitable. Some students can constructively cope with stress, while others are negatively affected. This could also be due to the student's poor mental health (American Psychological Association, 2018). The harmful influence of stress on one's health has been widely publicized; articles, news, posters, and even educators have heightened the adverse effects of stress, unknowingly instilling in students' minds that stress is unpleasant and destructive.

Student's Self-connection Levels

Self-connection in conceptualization is the sense of connection that is related to the perceived self. It refers to the presence and relationship between three dimensions (1) an awareness of oneself, (2) an acceptance of oneself based on this awareness, and (3) an alignment of one's behaviors with this awareness. Furthermore, the result of the current study shows that the respondents obtained a slightly high Self-connection. This means that the respondents are somewhat

connected to themselves, slightly aware of themselves, and accept themselves. Students fairly know and understand themselves, thus spending lesser time checking their actions as reflected in their true selves. Also, students can partially identify and understand their feeling in a given situation.

According to Dr. Klussman (2020), individuals who are highly connected to themselves pay great attention to and acknowledge their own emotional, spiritual, and bodily needs daily. They have a strong sense of who they are and what they want, as well as a strong belief foundation. They are entirely absorbed in their physical bodies, allowing them to quickly determine what is bothering their emotions, what kind of action their bodies need, and when they need 'alone time'. They are aware of what they are doing right now that fits into their overall life purpose. It is a heightened state of being. High Self-connection is not attainable easily, and it takes practice and a long process of learning and knowing oneself (Sitt, 2019).

Student's Level of Personal & School Burnout

Burnout is a psychiatric disorder characterized by a persistent feeling of tiredness or lack of energy, increasing feelings of detachment from work/activities, or reduced enthusiasm and enjoyment of formerly gratifying endeavors, as well as inefficiency in terms of performance and competence (World Health Organization, 2019). It is considered one of the major concerns of the school administration and educators today. Moreover, the findings of the current study suggest that the respondents have a high level of personal and school burnout. These data indicate that students highly experience physical, and psychological fatigue and exhaustion related to their personal experiences and school demands. They often feel physically and emotionally exhausted. They frequently think that they cannot handle their situation anymore and thus experience feelings of being worn out. They also feel that every school hour is tiring, and frustration and burnout about school-related work were experienced by the students.

Students' high level of burnout could be attributed to their abrupt changes in daily routines caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, getting overwhelmed by stress exacerbated by isolation, and a diminished physical engagement with peers and other people in the neighborhood and school. Increased workloads as a result of the transition from traditional face-to-face learning to today's distant learning modality, which required students to convert their outputs to online formats and increase their screen time in front of their devices contribute to student burnout levels (Tomaszek & Muchacka-Cymerman, 2020). These results are consistent with prior research, which revealed that burnout is prevalent among students (Rahmati, 2015). Moreover, the result of this study supports the findings of Viana (2020) where it is found that students experienced feelings of burnout, with their overloaded and straining course works being regarded as the primary culprit.

In the Philippines, the Veritas Truth Survey, conducted by Radio Veritas in October 2020, revealed that 34% of respondents are weary and 30% are anxious about their online classes. Only 8% of the participants showed determination in their online classes, while 10% of the participants expressed restlessness. According to the poll, tiredness is more prevalent among high school and college students (Bernardo, 2020). Moreover, Ramos et al., (2021) state that students experience moderate to high risks of burnout, and females experience higher burnout levels compared to males. The findings are in line with the study of Aranas et al. (2020) who found that college students' burnout level predicts the occurrence of anxiety, depression, and suicidal ideation.

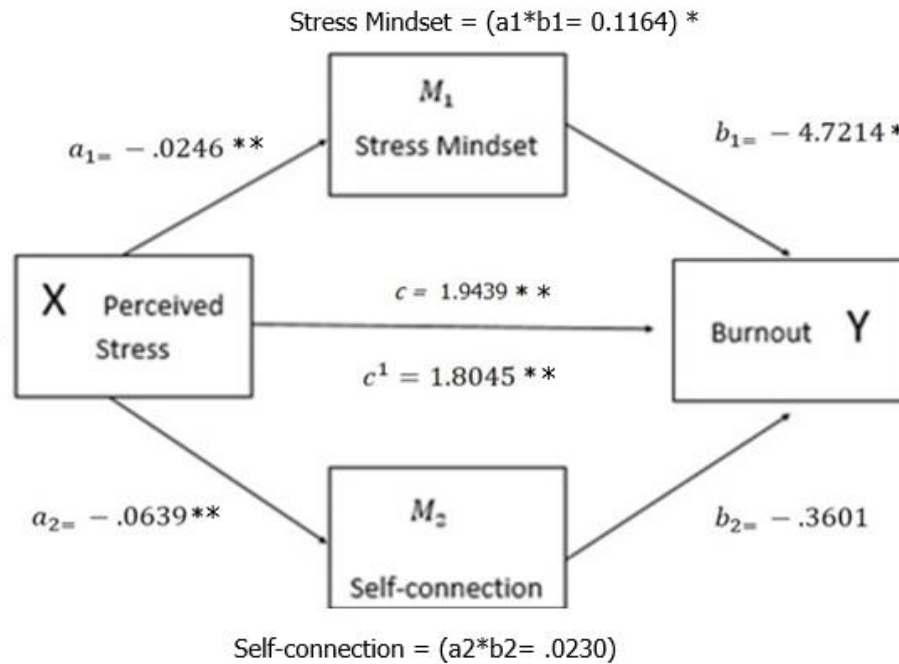
Many factors have been identified as contributing to student burnout. Socioeconomic status (SES), life satisfaction, and social support were found as three critical determinants. These three elements may either alleviate or exacerbate student burnout (Ye et al., 2021). Students' personality also impacts how these factors affect the student (Moontanez, 2019).

The effect of COVID-19 pandemic appears to have played a substantial influence on the surge in student burnout (Ramos, 2021). Students' mental health became a prominent concern due to an apparent increase in psychological problems.

Parallel Mediation Statistical Diagram

Mediational regression analysis (Model 4) using PROCESS (Hayes, 2018) was utilized to evaluate whether stress mindset and self-connection mediate the relationship between the predictor variable (perceived stress) and the outcome variable (burnout). The data's linearity, normality, and homoscedasticity were also checked to fulfill the assumptions needed in mediation analysis. Parallel mediation model was used in the study wherein the predictor variable was modeled as the influencing consequent of the outcome variable, through its association with the two mediators. The mediators are independent of each other and they do not causally influence one another. Also, they are assumed to transmit the causal effect of the predictor variable to the outcome variable.

The figure below illustrates the Parallel Mediation Statistical Diagram. This is utilized for a better understanding of the paths between the variables where the coefficients are illustrated vis-à-vis the research paradigm of the current study.



The Parallel Mediation Statistical Diagram denotes the effect of perceived stress on burnout as mediated simultaneously by stress mindset and self-connection. The total effect (path c) represents the combined effects of the direct and indirect effect. The direct effect (path c^1) represents the effect of perceived stress on burnout when the mediators stress mindset and self-connection are controlled in the model. The indirect effects (path $a_1 b_1 a_2 b_2$) represent the effect of perceived stress on burnout through stress mindset and self-connection respectively.

The total effect of perceived stress on school burnout, $c = 1.9439$, represents a 1.9439 overall estimated difference in their school burnout score, which is determined from the sum of direct and indirect effects. The obtained total effect in this model is deemed to be significant as it is statistically different from zero, as revealed by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval from 1.7373 to 2.1504.

Interestingly, the results revealed that perceived stress significantly predicts school burnout. The direct effect of perceived stress on burnout, $c^1 = 1.8045$, reflects 1.8045 estimated difference in the burnout score between two students who differ by one unit in their perceived stress scores if the mediator variables remain constant. The positive sign indicates that students who feel higher levels of perceived stress tend to experience higher levels of burnout. In addition, the obtained direct effect in this model is deemed to be significant as it is statistically different from zero as revealed by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval from 1.5746 to 2.0344

These results denote that perceived stress levels account for school burnout levels. Students with higher perceived stress are more likely to experience higher

tendencies of school burnout. Stress level determines the school burnout levels of the students. The current findings affirm the study of Xu et al. (2021) that the negative impact of perceived stress is a vital contributor to burnout. As stress progressed to burnout, exhaustion was thought to emerge first due to excessive demands and overload. Detachment and negative attitudes to people follow. If this process continues, emotions of inadequacy and failure will emerge as the next stage.

In line with this, Scott (2020) stated that individuals who struggle to cope with stress and experience stress constantly for a long period of time can have burnout episodes. Burnout is often accompanied by a slew of mental and physical health issues. Burnout can make it difficult for a person to operate successfully in their daily life if it is not addressed properly.

As seen in the results of the analysis, the Direct Effect is less than the value of the Total Effect. This means that the effect of perceived stress on school burnout is less yet still significant when the mediators' stress mindset and self-connection are controlled. This decrease, albeit small, is a statistically significant value of the Direct Effect, and indicative of a Partial Mediation. Refer to Appendix F for the complete mediation results.

Meanwhile, taken separately, the indirect effect of perceived stress on burnout syndrome through stress mindset, ($a_1*b_1= 0.1164$) is found to be significant as revealed by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval from (.0603 to 0.1819). This indicates that two students who differ by one unit in their perceived stress scores are estimated to differ by 0.1164 units in their burnout scores. This may result from the tendency of those under relatively high perceived stress to view stress negatively as indicated by the negative algebraic sign of the obtained coefficient in path "a1" analysis ($a_1 = -.0246$). This in turn translates into a higher tendency for burnout experience as indicated by the negative algebraic sign of the obtained coefficient in path "b1" analysis ($b_1 = -4.7214$).

From the foregoing results, it can be inferred that a student with an increased level of perceived stress and who views stress as debilitating (negative) may experience burnout. In contrast, students with lower levels of perceived stress and has enhancing mindset (positive) are less likely to experience burnout.

Stress and burnout tendencies among college students are rampant and have several undesirable emotional and professional consequences (Evans et al., 2018 & Guthrie et al., 2017). Cognizant of this, it is vital to understand the ways how to protect the students from possible negative consequences. The way people respond to stress is shaped by their mindset. An individual's stress mindset is a key component in determining whether stress will be harmful or beneficial to them. The stress mindset suggests that positive stress beliefs lead to positive outcomes rather than negative consequences when faced with stressors (Crum et al., 2013). Individuals may have a stress-enhancing mindset and a stress-debilitating mindset. The present findings in this study indicate that students with high levels of

perceived stress have a stress-debilitating mindset, which is commonly referred to as a negative view of stress. Students who have a stress-debilitating mindset believe that stress will hinder their development and productivity. Some people believe it will harm their health and lessen their enthusiasm while others will shun opportunities or duties that may increase their stress levels (Niemic, 2019). The increased perceived stress was linked to more mental health issues; however, the risk was higher for those who have a stress-debilitating mindset (Chen & Qu, 2021).

Higher school burnout levels are also linked to a stress-debilitating mindset among students. This means that when students' perceptions of stress become more negative, their school burnout rises. This is consistent with the study of Klussman et al., (2020) which conveyed that students who perceive stress as debilitating are more likely to experience school-related burnout.

In contrast, students with a stress-enhancing mindset are most likely to experience lesser stress levels. Individuals with a stress-enhancing mindset react to stress more positively and are less negatively affected by it. Individuals with a stress-enhancing mindset view stress as an avenue for growth and prompt challenge that pushes them to develop higher energy to produce excellent outputs (Niemic, 2019). People with a stress-enhancing mindset were less likely to develop depression and anxiety symptoms when confronted with more difficult life events than people with a stress-debilitating mindset (Jiang et al., 2019; Huebschmann & Sheets 2020). Additionally, having a stress-enhancing mindset is thought to be a protective element that can help individuals overcome challenges and improve their overall well-being (Fate, 2019).

The current findings also show that self-connection is not a significant mediator of the effect of perceived stress on school burnout. As reflected in Figure 2, the indirect effect of perceived stress on burnout syndrome through self-connection is ($a_2 \times b_2 = .0230$). This indicates that two students who differ by one unit in their perceived scores are estimated to differ by .0230 units in their burnout scores as a result of the tendency for those under relatively high perceived stress to experience low self-connection as indicated by the negative algebraic sign of the obtained coefficient in path "a2" analysis ($a_2 = -.0639$), which in turn translates into a higher tendency for burnout experience as indicated by the negative algebraic sign of the obtained coefficient in path "b2" analysis ($b_2 = -.3601$) this indirect effect is deemed to be insignificant, $p = .6240$. It can be assumed that the mediation does not take place, as revealed by a 95% bootstrap confidence interval from (-.0742 to .1199).

Even though a direct effect between self-connection and perceived stress is evident, no evidence of direct effects associated with self-connection and school burnout was seen in the results. These findings relate to the study by Klussman et al., (2020) which states that self-connection was not significantly related to either school-related or personal burnout. The insignificant results for self-connection as

a mediator between the relationship of perceived stress and burnout might be because of the levels of self-connection the student obtained. A slightly high self-connection among students was evident in the result. Self-connection at a high level is difficult to achieve easily and a prolonged process of learning and knowing oneself is needed (Sitt, 2019). Students at this age are still learning about themselves, unwinding their inner selves, and establishing identities, which may hinder their potential to develop a significant high connection within themselves (Stocking, 2005). Students' personalities and the type of stressors they are exposed to might influence the insignificant results which were not accounted for in the study.

Research on self-connection is still considered to be in its early stages, nevertheless, the results of its link to improved health and well-being are found to be very encouraging. Self-connection is linked to various health and well-being outcomes, including thriving, life satisfaction, positive affect, and purpose in life (Klussman et al., 2020). The significant relationship between mindfulness and well-being is explained by self-connection (Klussman et al., 2020). The value and relevance of self-connection in comprehending various ways to improve well-being have also been established.

These findings, when taken together, provide a wealth of information on students' stress levels. Students, regardless of their field of study, face stress. Student stress, if not appropriately controlled, can have a long-term impact on one's emotions, learning style, and psychological well-being (Rodriquez-Hidalgo et al., 2020). Aware of these results, having the appropriate perspective on stress, on the other hand, appears to have a positive impact on one's health, according to research.

Individual differences in stress response may exist, and these differences are changeable in some ways. This is an opportunity to teach students how to improve their well-being both inside and beyond the classroom by increasing self-connection and supporting an adaptive view of stress. Students who are conscious of themselves are more likely to choose a healthy lifestyle and, as a result, learn to counteract the harmful effects of stress. Developing a stress-enhancing attitude is a useful tool in the fight against stress.

Mindsets are flexible, according to study and treatments work. Students can acquire a growth mindset. Developing a growth mindset entails numerous beneficial outcomes (Yeager & Dweck, 2012). These findings might help administrators and educators develop programs that can assist the students in developing and acquiring a stress-enhancing mindset—providing evidence that illustrates the benefit of stress rather than highlighting the adverse effects of stress which is common to be an unpleasant part of life. Therefore, the study asserts to view stress from a different perspective by reducing the discussion that highlights its harmful effects. The results suggest that focusing on the negative effects of

stress is ineffective. It is not adaptive and may even be linked to greater student burnout.

Studies have proved the beneficial outcome of having a positive view of stress. For example, in the article of Parker (2015) which mentioned Stanford psychologist Kelly McGonigal's study, it was found that stress is not really harmful and that embracing the concept of stress can actually make an individual more robust, brighter, and happier. Furthermore, having a stress-enhancing mindset can be considered a protective factor. This allows the individual to view stress as helpful, controllable, and normal which everyone can experience and overcome. People who have adopted an adaptive mindset interpret things differently. Rather than seeing challenging occurrences as obstacles to be conquered, they see them as challenges to conquer and are more likely to succeed. They also engage in more adaptive coping mechanisms, which are more likely to result in favorable outcomes (Yeager, 2016).

The positive results from this previous body of literature can explain why having a stress-enhancing mindset is related to burnout. That is, people who have an adaptive view of stress rather than seeing stressful experiences as debilitating may consider them as opportunities for growth. These people may put more effort to invest in developing adaptive coping mechanisms in response to a potential threat. The resulting experience may be pleasing to them and thus boost their adaptive view of stress.

Additionally, self-connection is believed to enhance the stress resilience of the student; and even though it is still in its preliminary years and further research is recommended, its contribution to promoting healthier well-being is found to be significant. People who are connected to themselves view stressors in their life differently compared to those who are not self-connected. People who are self-connected have a strong sense of understanding of who they are and what they want, have a strong belief foundation, and have the potential to screen stressful life and work situations. Someone who is strongly self-connected may not even choose to be stressed. If they believe it is appropriate, they have the capability to engage with the circumstance or make an effort to cope with it (Klussman & Curtin et al., 2020; Klussman & Nichols et al., 2020). Possibly, the benefit of self-connection in one's well-being is the filtering process of stressors (Klussman & Lindeman et al., 2020). Educators and students may also engage in programs and activities that will promote self-connection among students which include topics about self-awareness, self-acceptance, and behavioral alignment (Klussman & Lindeman et al., 2020).

Finally, educators play an important role in shaping the future of the students, and they are at the forefront of helping the students to face possible challenges whether in the classroom or outside it. Programs, policies, and activities that will promote a positive view of stress can enhance students' well-being. This will prepare students to overcome stress and help them acquire and develop an

adaptive view of stress by encouraging them to be connected to themselves, thus, in the process, lessening the probable occurrence of burnout.

Theoretical Implication

The Stress Process Model has been used as a basis for understanding the relationship between stress and burnout (Hish et al., 2019) wherein it includes three fundamental elements to form the stress process which include the stressors, the mediators, and the stress outcome. The current study utilized this as a basis for exploring the mediational relationship between the variables. The relationship between perceived stress and school burnout mediated by stress mindset and self-connection was examined. The results of the current findings suggest that perceived stress is a strong predictor of school burnout, hence, burnout is more likely to occur in individuals who experience high amounts of stress. Prolonged and continuous experience of stress may lead to burnout episodes if unmanaged well (Scott, 2020).

Stress mindset is believed to buffer the negative impact of stress on the individual. The theory of stress mindset suggests that when an individual is exposed to stressors, positive stress beliefs produce positive outcomes rather than negative ones (Crum et al., 2013). According to the theory, the mindset of an individual in adapting to a stressful situation is the key to determining whether stress will have a negative (stress-debilitating mindset) or positive (stress-enhancing mindset) effect on them (Crum et al., 2013). The results agreed with the theory of stress mindset, that is, burnout is assumed to be the negative impact of stress and it is more likely to occur in students who experience high amounts of stress and have a stress-debilitating mindset. Students with high stress levels but has stress-enhancing mindsets, on the other hand, are less prone to go through burnout.

Furthermore, results also demonstrated that the association between perceived stress and school burnout is not mediated by self-connection. However, when considered independently, perceived stress and school burnout have a significant inverse association with self-connection. High levels of self-connection among students may buffer them against the negative effects of stress and burnout because they have a solid sense of who they are and what they stand for, therefore, people with a high level of self-connection are better at filtering the potentially stressful situations or people they will encounter (Klussman et al., 2020). As a result, they are less likely to engage with unproductive potential stressors. A person who is very self-connected may not even choose to participate in or make an effort to cope with a potentially stressful event if they do not regard it as being compatible with their basic values and aims. This viewpoint does not suggest that the ability to be self-connected alters how one manages stress, but rather stops someone from interacting with potentially stressful situations.

Taking into account the results of the study, having an adaptive view of stress and being connected to oneself may enhance student stress resilience and thus prevent them from burnout experience. Given the functional nature of a positive stress mindset and self-connection, further research and interventions for students and educators to enhance well-being and maintain its positive impact on the student are needed.

CONCLUSION

Mental health studies have become prevalent during the pandemic with the aim of understanding its effects on people. Nevertheless, what sets this study apart and unique from others is that it presents the predictive and mediation model. According to the findings of the present study, perceived stress is a strong predictor of school burnout. Burnout may occur in students who have a high level of perceived stress. Nonetheless, the association between perceived stress and school burnout is considerably mediated by a stress mindset. Students with high-stress levels and a stress-debilitating mindset (negative) are more vulnerable to burnout. In contrast, students with high stress levels but who have a stress-enhancing mindset are less likely to experience burnout.

Furthermore, results also revealed that self-connection does not mediate the relationship between perceived stress and school burnout, but taken independently, self-connection has a significant inverse relationship with perceived stress and school burnout. Students who are highly connected to themselves might be protected from the adverse effect of stress and burnout.

Notably, there is still a need for future studies and interventions that students and teachers may employ to improve well-being and retention.

RECOMMENDATION

Educators and administrators should create a new culture of introducing and teaching stress, and instead of focusing on stress in a bad way, build programs and lectures that explain the positive aspects of stress, such as the ones highlighted in this study. It is also important to refrain from demonizing stress and instead focus on its benefits. There is also a need to establish programs that will assist students in developing a stress-enhancing mindset, by helping them recalibrate their minds in viewing the impact of stress.

Future researchers may examine other mediating variables such as positive emotions, social support, spirituality, and religiosity that may influence the relationship between perceived stress and school or personal burnout. Exploring how self-connection and stress mindset influence responses to objectively stressful situations event (e.g. the Trier Social Stress Test; Kirschbaum et al., 1993 and

experimental research on the effectiveness of stress-enhancing mindset programs and self-connection interventions may also be a focus of future undertakings.

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