

Life stressors and their relationship to assertiveness for university students

**Sherehan Atef Ibrahim Ibrahim
(Ph.D.)**

Assistant Professor social work with individual
and families- Helwan University, Cairo, Egypt

Abstract:

This study aimed to determine the nature of the relationship between Life stressors and Assertiveness for University Students. It also aimed at Identify indicators for social workers roles with University Students. A purpose sample of (395) University Students (123 males, 31.2%, 272 females, 68.2%), the study found that There are a statistically significant inverse relationship between the Assertiveness and life stressors and its various dimensions (Family stress, Academic stress, Economic stress, stress from colleagues or friends, Services-related stress) For University Students

Also study shows that there are statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of Assertiveness at a level of (0.05), and indicated that there are no statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of life stressors of University Students as a whole

Key words:

Life stressors–Assertiveness - University Students

Introduction:

The university represents the resource of the state's leaders politically, scientifically, economically and culturally, and community service is the actual translation of the university's functions in order to adapt to the growing societal needs and problems and work to bring about comprehensive development, The total number of students enrolled in higher education reached about 3.4 million students for the academic year 2020/2021 compared to 3 million students for the academic year 2019/2020, with an increase of 2.6% (Central Agency for Public Mobilization and Statistics, 2021).

Stress is a part of our life; it has become an important topic in the academic circle because of its various effects on students due to the university life's transitional phase. When students try to adapt to the surrounding environment and new situations, stress and anxiety often occur. For example, there are many academic stresses such as the huge amount of information to comprehend given the lack of time available, the large number of exams the students are required to pass, in addition to assignments for each course (Parveen, 2016, p.28). In this regard, Edjah et al. (2020) showed that the level of stressors among university students is average, and they were represented in academic stress, followed by institutional stress, then social and economic stress. The study also indicated the importance of dealing

with these external stressors to enhance students' academic life. Moreover, Mazo (2015) showed that one of the most important causes of stress among students is academic stress, taking the form of spending many nights without enough sleep to meet the study requirements which, in turn, had an effect on triggering the nervous mood. Ali and El-Sherbini's (2018) study also found a high level of external stressors and especially the study stress in students' life forming a source of academic stress for them; these stressors were associated with some demographic variables such as age, gender, and social level. According to Yumba (2008), university students suffer from many stresses, the most important of which are academic stress, followed by personal, family and social stress constituting the least stressful. Besides, it was found that females are higher in the level of feeling stress compared to males. The ecological theory explains the mutual influential relationship between man and the surrounding social environment and it is important to identify external stressors for university students because of their impact on the occurrence of many problems that may affect their academic level in particular and their personal and social compatibility in general

Moreover, Damush, Hays and DiMatteo (1997) showed that university students suffer from stressful life events represented in some personal and family stress and sexual life events related to the quality of their healthy life.

Life stresses include situations everyone goes through in their life and believes that they exceed their abilities, potentials, and personal and environmental resources necessary to deal with them causing them to feel anxious, fearful or unable to control such situations (Al-Nohi, 2001, p. 97). Parveen's study (2016) demonstrated that most of the stress students suffer from has to do with daily troubles and life events the students cannot cope with, yet most students suffer from academic stress. For Pfeiffer (2001), university students and graduates suffer from a variety of stressors, i.e. personal, academic and environmental, which contribute to raising their tension.

Stress originates from more or less significantly intense and permanent events that might reduce the individual's harmonic ability which may lead to behavioral and functional impairment of the student (Abdel Moaty, 2006, p. 23). Similarly, Young (2017) indicated that students encountering economic burdens and working more than six hours suffer more from external stressors than those who work less than six hours. Stress may also affect the way students

think and act according to Brough's study (2015) which illustrated that students' perceived stressors are negatively related to their subjective experiences derived from their various activities, and their beliefs, thoughts and perceptions affected the form of stressors they face, and the use of cognitive and emotional methods had a significant impact on reducing some stressors.

Gies and Elhudaybi (2014) also confirmed that there is a significant causal relationship between the perception of the stressors of life events and the perceived self-efficacy of students; the more there is a positive perception of life stressors, the higher the level of self-effectiveness, and the intensity of stress is directly affected by some stress-coping strategies centered on solving the given problem.

According to the concept of self-esteem; which is represented in a person's sense of competence, respect and merit, it has many positive effects on his thinking and behavior, and this supports his ability to face challenges and raises his self-confidence. For Hamaideh (2011), the highest level of stress experienced by students was self-imposed stress, and it was found that there was a negative relation between stressors and students' expectations and the level of the parents' education.

Assertiveness, according to Garner (2012), is the most effective way to solve personal problems in a straightforward way. It opens doors for communication, openness, and honesty by receiving messages without distortion and maintaining relationships with others. It also helps people improve their self-image (p. 13). Parray et al. (2020), in addition, showed that assertiveness predicts self-esteem, and that the level of academic achievement is affected by the degree of the individual's assertiveness.

Furthermore, Wara and Salim (2018) highlighted that undergraduates have a good level of assertive behavior, and the university has helped develop this behavior through the process of continuous social interaction. In the same vein of thought, Bshir (2016) pinpointed the effect of positive assertive behavior on increasing self-efficacy and developing students' social competence.

Assertive communication skills, moreover, can enhance students' relationships, reduce stress caused by conflict and provide social support when facing hard times, which leads to the elimination of a major source of stress for many people (Pipas & Jaradat, 2010, p. 649).

Hasnain (2021) found a statistically significant positive relationship between assertiveness and students' social competence. The study indicated the importance of social interaction with others and defending the personal rights of assertiveness in predicting students' social competence. One of Younes' (2021) findings emphasized a positive relationship between assertiveness and social support for university students. It also found no statistically significant differences between males and females on the assertiveness scale.

Assertiveness, according to Pourjali and Zarnaghash (2010), is concerned with the legitimate and honest expression of the individual's personality, rights, feelings, beliefs and interests without violating or denying the rights of others, and it has to do with the ability to express one's feelings and assert one's rights while respecting the others' feelings and rights (p.137). Parmaksız (2019), hence, concluded that undergraduates' assertiveness degrees predicted their adaptation to the university emotionally, personally, heterosexually, socially, academically in macro adaptation degrees.

Moghames (2018) asserted that the level of assertive behavior among students is average. The study found that there is a statistically significant positive relationship between assertive behavior and decision-making among students, and the level of decision-making among students was weak. It was also found that assertiveness in males is higher than in females. Likewise, Pourjali and Zarnaghash (2010) showed a statistically significant positive relationship between assertiveness and mental health among undergraduates; that is, when there is a higher emphasis, there will be better mental health. Conversely, there are no differences between males and females in assertiveness among undergraduates .

According to the cognitive theory, life stressors do not cause anxiety and tension in themselves, but the students' mistaken and irrational thoughts and beliefs in some situations forming a threat and harm to themselves is the reason for the occurrence of stress. Therefore, changing illogical thoughts and negative conversations they might have about stressful events leads to a change in the emotional and behavioral response towards the given events.

Based on the theoretical framework and the results of previous studies, the problem of the study is determined in the following question:

What is the relationship between assertiveness and life stressors for university students?

Study Objectives:

- 1-Determine the nature of the relationship between Life stressors and Assertiveness for University Students.
- 2-Access indicators of the role of social workers to decrease Life stressors as well as increase Assertiveness for University Students.

Study Concepts:

1 Life stressors :

Life stressors are defined as a set of negative external circumstances and attitudes facing individuals in various aspects of their life such as academic, family, social, work environment, and others, which directly affect their performance, and create many internal stresses for them (Abdlmawgod, 2019, p.79). **Life stressors are measured procedurally** by the degree that the student gets on the scale of life stressors; which consists of (family stress - study stress - the stress of colleagues / friends - economic stress - stress related to services)

2- Assertiveness:

Assertiveness is defined as a set of positive responses that indicate the individual's ability to freely express his emotions, opinions, rights, friendly and emotional feelings, etc.; it also entails the tendency to giving orders, self-control, self-confidence, challenge and commitment (Pfafman,2017, p3)). Assertiveness also refers to the ability to express both positive and negative emotions; it is a decent expression that suits personal and social situations and establishes a balance between subjective and external requirements. It might even reach the level of taking risks, getting out of the box, developing someone's positive abilities, or controlling feelings of anger, shyness or fear (Baza, 2011, p.4).

Assertiveness is measured procedurally by the degree that the students get on the scale of assertiveness.

The addressed theories for the study:

1-Cognitive theory:

Cognitive theory includes ideas, knowledge, beliefs, assumptions, expectations, trends and perceptions. Our thoughts can reflect what is happening in the outside world and may even be distorted to the point that we might misunderstand what is happening around us. Hence, most of life's problems are the result of cognitive misunderstandings or beliefs that are not supported by external evidence, and cognitive interventions help clients gain awareness in order to defeat misconceptions that contribute to solving problems and replace them with beliefs and behaviors that lead to improved performance (Walsh, 2006, p.108).

For Miller (2012), automatic thoughts refer to the thoughts which depend on assumptions occurring directly, such as making a familiar reaction to stressors perceived and interpreted as negative or threatening. Such thoughts can occur to anyone, and they are based on their cognitive scheme and may lead to emotional problems after that. It is worth noting that a high level of stressors leads to these harmful automatic thoughts (Miller, 2012, p.103).

2-Ecological theory:

Ecological theory focuses on understanding the nature of social phenomena on the study of a set of facts and general concepts such as human growth processes and problems; the nature of the dynamic relationship between the biological, mental, emotional and social aspects to individual; and the dynamics of interaction between the individual and his social and physical environment. People live in a continuous interaction with the environment, and this interaction is represented in the mutual influence between individuals, families, groups and other forms of the physical and social environment (Payne, 2005, p. 143).

One of the important concepts of ecological theory is stress which constitutes a response to the suffering of daily life and is characterized by a state of emotional turmoil or imbalance or both. It is associated with negative feelings of anxiety, fear, a sense of inferiority, frustration, helplessness and despair, so the continuation of stress and failure in an attempt to adapt to them can lead to a poor psychological, emotional and social performance in addition to some external stressors as a result of negative interactions between the individual and his environment.

Methodology:

Study hypothesis:

The first hypothesis: There are a statistically significant inverse relationship between the assertiveness and life stressors and its various dimensions (i.e. family stress, academic stress, economic stress, social stress from colleagues or friends, services-related stress) for university students.

The second hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female on the scale of assertiveness.

The third hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female on the scale of life stressors and its various dimensions.

Sample :

The current study relied on the social survey method by the simple random sample method. The sample frame includes (6072) social work third-year students. However, a random sample involves (395) students: (123) male and (272) female. The sample selection is based on Stephen Thompson equation from Faculty of Social Work at Helwan University; according to the following conditions:

- To be a students of the third year of the faculty of social work.
- Regular students who attend faculty curriculum.
- Live with his normal family
- The student must agree to cooperate with the researcher

Study tools: Data collection tools were:

1-**Life stressors scale**,Abdlmawgod Preparation(2019)

Scale description: The scale consists of 40 statements distributed over five dimensions: (family stress - study stress - the stress of colleagues / friends - economic stress - stress related to services)

Dimension of family stress includes the phrases (4, 7, 10, 14, 17, 22, 26, 32, 36)

Dimension of Study stress includes statements (3, 9, 12, 20, 24, 28, 33, 37, 40)

Dimension of economic stress includes the statements (1, 6, 11, 15, 19, 23, 30, 35)

Dimension of the stress of colleagues and friends includes the statements (2, 8, 16, 21, 27, 34, 38)

Service-related stress includes statements (5, 13, 18, 25, 29, 31, 39)

Validity of the scale: The scale equipment verified the validity of the scale as follows:

Internal consistency validity: The scale statement correlation matrix was calculated with the total sub-dimension and the overall scale degree with the exclusion of statements that the results do not indicate that they are related to the total degree and were all significant at 0.01.

Factor Analysis: To check the saturation of statements on the five dimensions of the scale

Scale reliability: The reliability was calculated in three different ways, using Alpha. Kronbach, this coefficient (0.749), split-half method using Spearman-Brown's coefficient and its value (.821), Test-R-Test method and its value(0.812)

Correction method: Consists of five levels: very difficult=5, difficult=4, medium=3, Not difficult=2, Not completely difficult=1

2-Assertiveness scale for adolescent and youth: Baza Preparation (2011)

Scale description: The scale consists of 26 statements. The reliability of the scale was calculated by test-retest and scored (0.87). The validity was calculated using the self-affirmation test developed by Ghareeb (1995) that scored (0.85) and (0.83) for the males and females, respectively.

Correction method: Positive statements (1, 4, 5, 6, 9, 11, 16, 21, 22, 25, 26), Negative statements (2, 3, 7, 8, 10, 12, 13, 14, 15, 17, 18, 19, 20, 23, 24), Positive statement=1, Negative statement=0

The researcher has re-conducted the reliability as follows:

Scale reliability:

Test-R-Test method: The scale was applied and then re-applied again with an interval of two weeks, on a sample of (30) individual students from the study population without the basic sample size, and then the correlation coefficient was calculated in the first and second applications on the total score on the scale, and the results were as follows:

Table No. (1) shows the reliability of the measure of life stressors using test and retest (n=30)

No	Dimensions	Pearson's reliability coefficient value and significance
1	Family stress	0.944**
2	Academic stress	0.437*
3	Economic stress	0.832**
4	stress from colleagues or friends	0.933**
5	Services-related stress	0.660**
The scale as a whole		0.854**

** Significant at (0.01)

* Significant at (0.05)

Table (1) shows that: the reliability coefficients are statistically significant for the scale as a whole at a significant level (0.01), which indicates that the scale has a high degree of reliability, most of the reliability coefficients of the variables have a high degree of

reliability, and thus its results can be relied upon and thus the tool is in its final form

Table No. (2) Shows the reliability of the measure of assertiveness using test and retest (N=30)

Assertiveness Scale	Pearson's reliability coefficient value and significance
The scale as a whole	0.645**

** Significant at (0.01)

* Significant at (0.05)

Table (2) shows that: the reliability coefficients are statistically significant at a significant level (0.01), which indicates that the scale has a high degree of reliability

The study hypotheses results: The first hypothesis: There are a statistically significant inverse relationship between the Assertiveness and life stressors and its various dimensions (Family stress, Academic stress, Economic stress, stress from colleagues or friends, Services-related stress) For University Students

Table (3) shows the relationship between Assertiveness and life stressors For University Students: (N =395)

No	Dimensions	Assertiveness
1	Family stress	-0.530**
2	Academic stress	-0.571**
3	Economic stress	-0.453**
4	stress from colleagues or friends	-0.433**
5	Services-related stress	-0.485**
Total scale	life stressors	-0.588**

*significant at (0.05)

**significant at (0.01)

The table above shows that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship at a level of (0.01) between the dimensions of life stressors as a whole and Assertiveness of University Students. The level of the life stressors increased as the Assertiveness decreased, for University Students, thus proving the first hypothesis of the study

The second hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean degrees of male and female on the scale of Assertiveness

Table (4) shows the differences between the average male and female degrees on the scale of Assertiveness For University Students (N =395)

Gender	Number	Mean	S.D	The value of t	df	Level of significance Sig(2-tailed)
Males	123	19.52	3.287	6.407	209.94	Significant 0.022*
Females	272	17.31	2.879			

*significant at (0.05)

**significant at (0.01)

The table above shows that there are statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of Assertiveness at a level of (0.05). The differences were in favor of males, meaning males had higher Assertiveness than females, thus proving the second hypothesis of the study.

The third hypothesis: There are statistically significant differences between the mean scores of male and female on the scale of life stressors and its various dimensions

Table (5) shows the differences between the average male and female scores on the scale of life stressors and its various dimensions

(N=395)

No	Dimensions	Male N=123		Female N=272		The value of t	Df	Level of significance Sig(2-taild)
		Mean	S.D	Mean	S.D			
1	Family stress	29.715	6.889	34.860	6.852	-6.895-	393	Non-Significant 0.102
2	Academic stress	28.365	4.916	31.525	5.556	-5.420-	393	Non-Significant 0.655
3	Economic stress	26.528	4.365	28.055	5.090	-2.881-	393	Non-Significant 0.120
4	stress from colleagues or friends	21.853	4.288	24.205	5.064	-4.476-	393	Non-Significant 0.108
5	Services-related stress	22.544	5.228	25.411	4.193	-5.353-	195.859	Significant 0.001*
6	life stressors	1.291	21.781	1.440	22.350	-6.195	393	Non-Significant 0.480

*significant at (0.05)

**significant at (0.01)

The table above shows that there are no statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of life stressors of University Students as a whole, and there are no statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the most dimensions of life stressors scale(family stress - study stress - the stress of colleagues / friends - economic stress),but there are statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the dimension of Services-related stress at level of(0.05), The differences were in favor of female, meaning that female have higher Services-related stress than male, thus proving the third hypothesis of the study was not valid.

Discussion

The current study found that there is a statistically significant inverse relationship at a level of (0.01) between the dimensions of life stressors as a whole and Assertiveness of university students. The level of life stressors increased as the Assertiveness decreased for university students, which is similar to Ali and El-Sherbini's results (2018). The stressors they suffer from are represented in academic stress, followed by institutional stress, then social and economic stress. Likewise, the results of the of Damush, Hays and DiMatteo's (1997) study confirmed that university students suffer from stressful life events. In addition, Wara and Salim (2018) emphasized that undergraduates have a good level of assertive behavior. Besides, Hasnain (2021) found a statistically significant positive relationship between assertiveness and students' social competence.

According to the ecological theory, stress is a response to daily life suffering and is characterized by a state of emotional turmoil or imbalance or both. It is associated with negative feelings of anxiety, fear, a sense of inferiority, frustration, helplessness and despair, so the continuation of stress and failure to adapt to them can lead to poor psychological, emotional and social performance. External stressors originate as a result of negative interactions between the individual and his environment and attempting to re-adapt to the surrounding environment and think rationally where the individual's beliefs and way of thinking determine the shape of his behavior. Also the self-esteem concept, which is represented in a student's sense of competence, respect and merit, it has many positive effects on his thinking and behavior, and this supports his ability to face challenges and raises his self-confidence. According to the cognitive theory; the students' mistaken and irrational thoughts and beliefs in some situations forming a threat and harm to themselves be the reason for the occurrence of stress. Therefore, changing illogical thoughts and negative conversations they might have about stressful events leads to a change in the emotional and behavioral response towards the given events, thus more compatibility and adaptation to life.

In addition, the current study showed that there are statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of assertiveness at a level of (0.05). The differences were in favor of males; in other words, males had higher assertiveness than females, similar to Moghames' study (2018) which found that assertiveness in males is higher than in females. Nevertheless, the results of the current study differ from those of Younes' (2021) which showed a positive relationship between assertiveness and social support for university students, and that there were no statistically significant differences between males and females on the assertiveness scale. Pourjali and Zarnaghash (2010)

demonstrated that there are no differences between males and females in assertiveness than undergraduates. This may be due to the nature of the Arab environment where males feel more confident and higher self-realized that it may contribute to achieving high assertiveness than females.

Finally, the current study indicates that there are no statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the scale of life stressors of university students as a whole, and there are no statistically significant differences between the average degrees of males and females on the dimensions of life stressors scale (i.e. family stress, study stress, the stress of colleagues/friends, and economic stress). Therefore, the results of the current study differ from those of Yumba's (2008) according to which females are higher in the level of stress feeling compared to males. This may be due to the way of thinking and life situations that male and female students are exposed to which most likely influence their actions.

Indicators of social worker roles to improve the assertiveness and reduce the life stressors for university students:

Therapeutic role: through the development of therapeutic programs for university students aimed at alleviating the various stress they suffer from and reducing their feeling of anxiety and tension, as well as developing programs based on cognitive therapy that helps them think rationally.

The role of the mediator: The social worker provides information to university students and their families from community institutions that provide services that can be used and facilitates the procedures for obtaining those services.

The role of the activist: Encouraging students to communicate with others and organize interpersonal relationships as a social skill through which personal and social adaptation is achieved, as well as pushing the environment around them to provide the necessary support for them, which helps to improve assertiveness as well as reduce stress.

The role of the teacher: This role depends on the social worker providing students with information about the harms caused by negative thinking, stress and life skills necessary to improve their social functions, which helps to increase their abilities to cope with these stress.

Research proposals:

- Methods of coping with stress and its relationship to future anxiety for university students.
- The effectiveness of rational emotional behavioral therapy in enhancing the assertiveness of university students.

- The effectiveness of the model in focusing on behavioral tasks to decrease stress for university students

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