Work Stress and Well-being

Academic work stress and its relation to the psychological well-being and social life of university master students
Abstract

The aim of this research study was to explore the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life of university master students. It was also examined whether the presence of control variables i.e. gender and living status had an influence on the relationship between the variables mentioned above. A total of 100 participants both male (N=56) and female (N=44) were conveniently drawn from master students pursuing different master programmes in the university and the spearman’s correlation results of how academic work stress is related to psychological well-being showed a significant strong negative correlation between the variables ($r_s=-.448$, $p < .001$) which suggests that students who experienced a high level academic work stress, experienced a lower level of psychological well-being. In addition, the results on the relationship between academic work stress and social life showed a significant negative correlation between variables ($r_s=-.293$, $p < .001$) meaning that a high level of academic work stress is negatively correlated with a lower level of social life among students. Also, the inclusion of living status as a control variable did not have an influence on the above relationship but including gender had a positive significant impact. Lastly, theoretical implications of the study as well as the conclusion were presented.

**Keywords:** stress, work stress, academic work stress, well-being, psychological well-being and social life.
Work Stress and Well-being

Acknowledgements and Dedication

Firstly, I would like to thank God Almighty for his infinite blessings that enabled me to pursue higher goals in life.

I also extend my gratitude to the Swedish Institute for awarding me the “Swedish Institute Study Scholarship” to pursue my Masters in Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology at Linnaeus University Växjö. I appreciate all the financial support they availed for my entire study period in Sweden.

In addition, my profound gratitude goes to my Supervisor Prof. Mikael Rennemark who has patiently guided me to this final stage through dedication and important feedback on my work progress. Also, my gratitude goes to my course coordinator Andrejs Ozolins for his support and guidance in regards to Statistics and other contributions to my thesis. Further, my gratitude goes to my examiner and all my teachers who prepared me for this final stage from year one of my studies to the final year. Thank you.

Lastly, I would like to thank my parents, my wife, my family members, friends and in-laws for their prayers, sacrifice and support.

I dedicate this thesis work to my wife, children and my mother. For they have been there for me throughout this period when am away from home.
Work Stress and Well-being

Work stress and well-being: Academic work stress and its relation to the psychological well-being and social life of university master students

Stress is seen as a complex and dynamic concept (Morrison & Bennett, 2009; Lazarus, 1999). There is an increasing interest in stress worldwide both among social, and biological scientists and other researchers. The extensive research on stress have indicated that the topic needs more attention and the reason for the growing interest has been attributed to rapid social change as well as to evidence indicating coping with stress is important for our social, physiological and psychological health and well-being (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Busari, 2014; Khan, Altaf & Kauser, 2013). According to Ragin (2011) while referring to Lazarus & Folkman, stress is triggered when an external stressor (or event) exceeds a person’s psychological, emotional, as well as physiological resources. In addition, stress has been noted as not being a one-time response to unchanging event but involves continuous interactions with the event. More so, researchers have also suggested that there is a need to treat stress as an organizational concept intended towards understanding phenomena of great relevance among human adaption therefore stress is more than just one variable but consists of a number variables and processes (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

Research literature indicates that well-being in the workplace has also become a topic of interest among researchers and much of this research focus on physical, emotional, psychological and mental well-being among individuals (Danna & Griffin, 1999). Excessive stress has been found to be an undermining factor towards the well-being of individuals and three phases of cognitive appraisal i.e. primary, secondary and reappraisal have been mentioned to have an impact on people’s well-being during stressful situations (Bell, Rajendran & Theiler, 2012).

The aim of this study was to study work stress and well-being and the research question was “what is the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and the social life of university master students?” This topic was chosen because research has shown that academic stress among students has not gained considerable attention as most researchers are preoccupied with the conventional work related stress as opposed to the stress that students encounter in their day to day lives at various universities or institutions of learning (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Also, master students were chosen as a target group because most research on academic work stress has referred mostly to undergraduate students so there was need to explore academic
Work Stress and Well-being

work stress at master studies level (Agolla & Ongori, 2009; Bataineh, 2013; Busari, 2014). Also, the researcher conducted a small oral interviews with some students in relation to how demanding and stressing their studies were a semester before the thesis was written so the responses from those interviews motivated further research in to academic stress. The main objective of the study was to look at how academic work stress relates to the well-being i.e. the psychological or emotional states of university master students as well as its relation to social life i.e. the time spent enjoying oneself with friends/ the opportunity to do enjoyable things. It is important to note that, well-being is often considered to go beyond physical health and encompass “the whole person” as well (Danna & Griffin, 1999). The main research question was guided by the more specific research questions presented at the end of this section.

Stress and Academic Work Stress

To understand academic work stress, there is need to first introduce and define what stress is so as to create insight in to the concepts as will be seen below:

Research literature concludes stress as growing to be an important topic of discussion and research. It has been seen as a normal reaction and part of individuals everyday life. On one hand, several definitions of stress have been brought forward for instance the word stress was used to mean hardships, adversity or afflictions around the 14th century (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and Hans Seyle (1936) being cited by Ragin (2011) defined stress as an orchestrated set of bodily defenses against any form of noxious stimulus. On the other hand, research has shown that there is no consensus in regards to the definition of stress and this is so because of the divergence of opinions among those trying to define the concept (Busari, 2014; Stephan, Packard and Manning, 1986; Robbins, Judge & Vohra, 2013; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Also, two main distinctions of stress are (a) eustress, which is a positive stressor that increases motivation and (b) distress, a negative stressor that disturbs bodily states (Lazarus, 1999; Robbins et al., 2013). However, for the purpose of this study stress is defined with reference to Topper’s definition as cited by Ongori & Agolla (2008) as being a person’s psychological and physiological response to the perception of demand and challenge.

Stress is a physical and mental reaction to everyday demands (daily hassles) and it has been cited to manifest when individuals define a salient situation as disturbing
Work Stress and Well-being

and they are unable to apply effective mechanisms to cope with or remove the disturbance. Also, the importance of the social and psychological factors in determining stress is seen in the fact that both these conditions i.e. what a person defines as disturbing and the resources utilized to cope are largely socially determined (Shuval, 1993). A number of theories of stress have been put forward by researchers but the principal theories that are seen as important in explaining the relationship between stress and illness as well as well-being include; the “fight-or-flight” theory by Walter Cannon which focused on the body’s physiological response to stress-inducing stimuli (Ragin, 2011); the general adaption syndrome (GAS) by Hanz Seyle which focused on identification of pathways through which stress elicits physiological reactions in organisms and lastly the transactional model of stress by Richard Lazarus & Susan Folkman who addressed some of the psychological triggers of stress and the researchers emphasized in their model that “stress is triggered when an external stressor (or event) exceeds a person’s personal and social resources to effectively cope with the event” (Ragin, 2011).

Several sources of stress among individuals have been identified and research has shown that these sources of stress differ from person to person as what is considered as stressful for one person may not be stressful for others. According to Morris (1990) the four main environmental sources of stress are (1) frustration that results from the hindering of needs and motives for example delays, hassles, lack of resources, losses, failure and discrimination among others, (2) conflict which occurs when people experience two or more incompatible motives concurrently for example having a job offer that has an attractive salary but unattractive in terms of its location, (3) pressure is another source of stress referring to anything that causes people to speed up, intensify, or adjust the way they behave and this can arise from competition, time limitations, work overload and interpersonal relationships, (4) change is the last source of stress presented by Morris and he notes that “All life involves change. People grow up, change jobs or careers, face the death of parents and friends, undergo illnesses, and adjust to innumerable other major and minor changes as they go through life” (p. 83). Other sources of stress include the self-imposed stress that arises when individuals have irrational beliefs about themselves and others. On the other hand, personal factors such as family problems, economic problems and personality are a source of stress as well as organizational factors such as task demands, role demands and interpersonal demands (Robbins et al., 2013).
Work Stress and Well-being

Additionally, it is important to note that stress can have either positive or negative effects and not all stress is harmful. Some of the effects of stress (both positive and negative) include; its ability to have a positive value for example in most organizations the stress that arises as a result of heavy workloads and deadlines is viewed by many professionals as positive challenges that help enrich the quality of their work as well as the satisfaction they obtain from work (Robbins et al., 2013). On the other hand, the negative consequences of stress include; the physiological symptoms such as changes in metabolism and blood pressure; the psychological symptoms such as job dissatisfaction, tension, anxiety, boredom as well as procrastination; and lastly, the behavioral symptoms including reductions in productivity, absence, turnover and sleep disorders among others. However, despite the above negative consequences of stress individuals can still cope with stress through strategies such as cognitive coping i.e. problem-focused coping where individuals address a problem through seeking relevant information so as to generate solutions to the issues, or emotion-focused coping which entails people seeking support from close friends and family for emotional reasons and the engagement or disengagement coping. On the other hand, individuals can also cope with stress through the use of the behavioral coping strategies such as for example aromatherapy, music relaxation, as well as humor as a response strategy to stress (Ragin, 2011).

Academic work stress among university master students

Academic work stress refers to “the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual” (Wilks, 2008). There is not much difference between stress, work stress and academic stress; the main differences that have been noted are on the settings or environment where this stress takes place and the related causes of the stress. More so, most scholars have been preoccupied with research on work-related stress hence little focus on the academic stress; however, academic stress should not be taken for granted because it can negatively impact the overall adjustments of students to their day to day activities (Busari, 2014). Nonetheless, some research have shown that there is a prevalence of stress among the graduate student population and it has been noted to interfere with the student’s academic outcomes, health and well-being (Nazione, Pace, Shugart & Smith, 2014). The stressors that are cited to affect students can be categorized into; “academic, financial, time, health-related and self-imposed” (Misra & McKean, 2000, p. 41).
Work Stress and Well-being

Research on academic stress among students has shown that academic stress generates from several factors such as studying for exams, complex assignments, failure to perform well in exams, lack of a support system, poor interaction with lecturers and colleagues, competition with colleagues in regards to grades, too much course content to cover in a very little time, over-crowded lecture halls as well as inadequate resources to perform academic tasks for instance few/no course books at the library. Several symptoms of academic stress have been pointed out among students including; impatience, nervousness, tension, trouble concentrating on studies, anxiety, strain, depressed mood as well as loss of energy and motivation among others. (Khan et al., 2013; Misra & McKean, 2000; Busari, 2014; Agolla & Ongori, 2009).

Additionally, research has shown academic stress, just like general stress, to be associated with both positive and negative effects on the lives and performance. (Robbins et al., 2013; Busari, 2012). However, if students are not able to effectively cope with the stressors, then the positive outcomes may be limited as they encounter more of the negative consequences of stress for instance those affected may face serious psycho-social-emotional health consequences such as drug abuse, violence, depression, dissatisfaction with life, poor relationships with peers and family members, poor attendance of lectures as well as decline in academic performance and even suicide. One study in Sweden found that 2.7% of Swedish students who were severely stressed attempted to commit suicide (Wilks, 2008; Busari, 2014; Thawabieh & Qaisy, 2012; Sharma, Prasad, Pandey, Singh, Sodhi & Wadhwa, 2013).

Furthermore, to manage stress among the student population, there is need to utilize coping strategies for instance they can engage in avoidance and wishful thinking as a coping strategy, meditation, crafting interventions and acceptance can also be strategies to be used by students as well as leaning on social support and using religion to cope (Nazione et al., 2014). The universities can also help in minimizing the risks of students being excessively affected by stress through maintenance of a well-balanced academic environment that is conducive for better learning and social life (Agolla & Ongori, 2009). Also, universities can set up counselling centers where affected students can seek help from and they should also plan short trainings on stress and stress management within the universities. In summary, it’s important to note that stress including academic work stress, if not managed in early stages, can have adverse effects on the performance, social life, health and well-being of students so there is need for
Work Stress and Well-being

more focus and research in the area so as to understand the concept of academic work stress better. The next section focuses on psychological well-being and its relation to academic work stress as will be detailed below.

Psychological well-being

Well-being as a concept has been noted by research literature to have several definitions and some of these definitions are dependent on the researcher’s specific domain of study for instance, some health models use the term well-being to characterize the overall state of an individual’s health (Ragin, 2011; Danna & Griffin, 1999). Additionally, well-being is seen as a more encompassing and broad construct as it comprises various non-work related and work related satisfactions enjoyed by individuals as well as general health. On one side, well-being can be defined with reference to the physical health of individuals and this is in relation to the symptomatology and epidemiological rates of illness and diseases. On the other hand, well-being can be defined in terms of the mental, psychological, or emotional states of individuals (Danna & Griffin, 1999). In psychology, three defining characteristics of well-being have been presented; firstly, well-being is a phenomenological event that is, individuals are happy when subjectively they believe they are happy. Secondly, well-being is characterized by an emotional aspect for example; individuals who are psychologically well are more likely to experience positive emotions as compared to negative ones (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). Lastly, well-being is believed to go beyond physical health and encompass the whole person as well (Danna & Griffin, 1999).

In addition, four models of well-being that represent the modern view of health were developed and tested in the 20th century. The first model that has been supported by scientific inquiry is the biomedical model which proposed that health is the absence of disease or dysfunction, the second model is the biopsychological or holistic health model which supports the belief that “well-being is determined by biological (bio), psychological (psycho), and sociological (social) factors”, the third model of well-being is the wellness model which defines health based on an individual’s assessment of his or her state of physical, mental, emotional and spiritual well-being. In this model both the psychological and social determinants are included as contributors to an individual’s health and well-being. The last model presented is the social ecological model which presents three unique determinants of health or wellbeing which include; physical and
Work Stress and Well-being

psychological environment, health systems and health policy (Ragin, 2011). The connection between well-being and health is that well-being offers a holistic view of health and some health models use well-being to characterize the overall state of a person’s health (Ragin, 2011). Also, the term health has been used to mean general sense of well-being and according to the World Health Organization constitution of (1946) health refers to a “state of complete physical, mental and social well-being and not merely the absence of disease or infirmity” (World Health Organization 2016; Morrison & Bennett, 2009, p. 13).

Research literature shows that positive emotional states and positive appraisals of individuals accentuate the well-being and quality of life of individuals as most people experience high levels of well-being when they experience pleasant emotions and when they are satisfied with their life’s (Rogers, Creed & Searle, 2012). According to well-being theorists, personality, cognitions, goals and coping efforts are believed to play a significant role in influencing the well-being of individuals (Rogers et al., 2012). Additionally, work is an influential part of an individual’s well-being as it affects the quality of life and the mental health of individuals. Furthermore, well-being is found to be in the best interest of communities, organizations and researchers and the assessment of well-being among workers, and recently among students has been a recurrent issue in the field of work and organizational psychology. (Harter, Schmidt & Keyes, 2003).

On the other hand, psychological well-being is defined “in terms of the overall effectiveness of an individual’s psychological functioning” and it measures the pleasantness dimension of individual feelings (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000). In addition, psychological well-being according to research literature distinguishes the difference between positive and negative affect in individuals (Ryff, 1995). Furthermore, Ryff (1995) presents six dimensions of psychological wellbeing: (a) self-acceptance which includes not only the possession of positive attitude toward the self but also the acceptance of one’s good and bad qualities (b) position relations with other people, (c) autonomy, (d) environmental mastery, (e) purpose in life, and (f) personal growth. These six dimensions represent variations of well-being based on different life experiences.

Organizational theorists just like clinical psychologists and public health researchers have recognized costs attributable to dysfunctional psychological well-being
Work Stress and Well-being

of individuals in organizations and some of the effects include; depression, fatigue, aggression, loss of self-esteem among affected individuals, hypertension, drug and alcohol abuse (Wright & Cropanzano, 2000; Bergin & Pakenham, 2015).

Academic work stress and psychological well-being among university master students

Students are often subjected to different kinds of stressors that affect their well-being in general and these stressors include; pressure from academics with the responsibility to succeed, an uncertain future after studies, social, emotional, physical and family problems which all interfere with the learning ability and the academic performance. Stressful events often arise when people appraise a situation as challenging and he or she does not have the appropriate skills to cope with it (Glozah, 2013; Busari, 2014). In addition, too much stress coupled with minimal social support from family and friends can cause physical, mental and psychological health problems and it has been noted to affect student’s general well-being as well as performance if not managed at early stages (Sugiura, Shinada & Kawaguchi, 2005; Glozah, 2013). According to Rogers et al. (2012) “stress associated with the academic learning environment has been linked to depression, poor health, and poor academic performance” (p. 473).

Research literature shows that health and well-being are relevant factors when it comes to student achievement in education and as far as educational institutions are concerned promoting the health and well-being of student’s means promoting effective learning and this helps students to cope with daily challenges including stress from their studies (Ansari & Stock, 2010). Furthermore, research has shown that in an academic setting, psychological well-being and stress do have a relationship. Rogers, Creed, and Searle (2012) found academic stress to be related to the well-being among students and the results of their study suggested that students who appraised schools or academics as stressful and threatening displayed lower levels of well-being.

Additionally, coping is conceptualized as cognitive and behavioral efforts to manage situations that individuals appraise as taxing or exceeding ones resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). It is essential to note that individual differences play an important role in the stress coping process and to cope with academic stress and its impacts on the psychological well-being of students, there is need for the reader to refer
Work Stress and Well-being

to the points mentioned in the section dealing with academic work stress among university students as the coping mechanisms for stress are already discussed in that section. In summary, the next section will present the research literature on academic work stress and social life of students as will be explained below.

Academic work stress and social life of university master students

Human beings are social by nature and as humans we have a need to belong and this need drives our thoughts, emotions and interpersonal behavior (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006). Social life refers to “the time spent enjoying oneself with friends/or the opportunities to do enjoyable things that exist in a particular place (Macmillan Dictionary, 2016). Additionally, social life influences our mental health and well-being and research literature indicates that being in a supportive social network of family, friends and colleagues improves the general health and well-being of individuals and without positive as well as durable caring relationships there is a tendency for individual’s minds and bodies to fall apart especially when exposed to highly stressful situations (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Glozah, 2013). Social support has been cited as an important stress buffer and according to Glozah (2013), social support refers to the social contacts and networks of relationships that an individual has and this can be formal or informal relationships.

Research literature indicates that individuals are in better health when they have strong social connections from both family and friends (Waite & Das, 2010). Furthermore, psychologists, sociologists, economists and other researchers have reported that social relationship’s matter and individuals who have a wide number of close supportive relationships have a higher level of positive well-being and life satisfaction (Zou, Ingram & Higgins, 2015). In addition, social support and the positive social life of students often help reduce the level of strain felt by individuals regardless of the intensity of the stressors experienced by the person (Viswesvaran, Sanchez & Fisher, 1999).

University life exposes students to several new experiences, challenges and life events and to some students; university may be exciting and a positive change of pace to their lives whereas to other students, it can be a recipe for disaster especially when the students have difficulty with coping with academic pressures and stress. Students are
Work Stress and Well-being

often faced with several stressors such as loneliness, burnout, and academic work load and these are more likely to cause poor physical health, depression and psychological distress in the absence of a positive social life and supportive social relationships (Stoliker & Lafreniere, 2015). Student life at Swedish universities has been noted to be varied and most universities have a host of activities at the student’s disposal intended to cater to their social life for example; several sports activities are available as well as fitness centers (Study in Sweden, 2016). However, despite all the above leisure activities intended to balance students academics and social life, research literature indicates that there is an increase in stress levels among students worldwide resulting from pressure of studies and this places a strain on the students interpersonal relationships as they fail to get a balance in life hence affecting their social life (Bataineh, 2013; Glozah, 2013; Busari, 2014).

In summary, the aim of this study was to focus on work stress and well-being and the research question was “what is the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and the social life of university master students?” The main objective of the study was to look at how academic work stress relates to the well-being i.e. the psychological or emotional states of university master students as well as its relation to social life i.e. the time spent enjoying oneself with friends/ the opportunity to do enjoyable things. The main research question was guided by the following more specific research questions; 1) What is the nature of academic work stress? 2) How is academic work stress related to psychological well-being of university master students? 3) How is academic work stress related to social life of university master students?

Methods
Research design and population

A questionnaire was administered to university master students at Linnaeus University Växjö-Sweden. A total of 100 participants both male (N=56) and female (N=44) were conveniently drawn from master students pursuing different master programmes in the university (15 different master programmes were included). The questionnaires were successfully filled in and returned. Before filling in the questionnaires, the ethical guidelines of informed consent and confidentiality were addressed by the researcher. The participants were told that participation was voluntary and they were also informed of the topic and purpose of the research as well as the relevance of their participation. With clear explanation of the purpose of the study 100
Work Stress and Well-being

students were willing to participate in the study except 1 student who could not participate because he was busy. In addition, with regards to research objective one (1) on the nature of academic work stress, several theoretical literature was reviewed so as to answer this question since it was included with the aim of increasing the readers insight on the topic of discussion, so no statistical analysis was performed on this objective.

Measures used in the study

The Lakaev Academic Stress Response Scale was used to measure academic stress. The questionnaire has a 5-point Likert response scale ranging from 1= “None of the time” to 5= “All of the time”. A sample item was; “I had trouble concentrating in class”. This scale was chosen because it is developed specifically for quantifying stress among university students in the stress response domain and it has an Alpha value ranging from .63 to .92 based on previous studies (Lakaev, 2006). The scores were summed up and the reliability of the instrument was tested and the Cronbach’s Alpha value found in this study for the above scale was .88 for a number of 20 items in the questionnaire.

Additionally, with regards to measuring psychological well-being among the students, the Psychological Well-being Scale was used because it describes “important aspects of human functioning ranging from positive relationships, to feelings of competence, and having meaning and purpose in life”. Besides, this scale correlates strongly with other psychological well-being scales and has shown alpha values at .69 and .80 (Diener et al., 2009). Responses were given on a 7-point scale ranging from 1= “Strongly disagree” to 7= “Strongly agree”. Sample items were; “I live a purposeful and meaningful life” and “I am engaged and interested in my daily activities”. All items in the psychological well-being scale are expressed in a positive direction. Scores can range from 8 (Strong disagreement with all items) to 56 (Strong agreement with all items). High scores imply that respondents view themselves in very positive terms in diverse areas of functioning. The Cronbach’s Alpha value in this study indicated a value of .87 for a total of 8 items in the questionnaire.

Lastly, to measure social life, three (3) questions in relation to contact with social network were adopted from the psychosocial and lifestyle questionnaire and one (1) was decided by the researcher in line with the several literature reviewed and also
Work Stress and Well-being

with reference to the definition of social life by Macmillan Dictionary (2016). In addition, the coefficient alpha for the items used on this scale was not calculated in the original scale because a high degree of internal consistency was not expected. Responses were given on a 6-point scale ranging from 1= “Three or more times a week” to “Less than once a year or never” (Smith, Fisher, Ryan, Clarke, House & Weir, 2013). However, this study found a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .67 for a total of 4 items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was reversed into positive scores during data analysis. In summary, the reliability of the instruments was tested so as to find out whether the instrument used can be interpreted consistently across different situations and the alpha coefficients presented above are good and acceptable. According to Pallant (2005), the Cronbach’s Alpha coefficients of a scale should be above 7, however, this values are sensitive to the number of items in the scale and with short scales containing less than 10 items, it is common to find alpha values as low as for example .5.

Statistical data analysis

The data was analyzed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 23. Descriptive analysis were performed so as to summarize and describe the main features of the sample for example; the age of respondents, sex of respondents and the programme of study of respondents. The Spearman’s correlation test was performed so as to find out how academic work stress is related to psychological well-being and social life of university master students. This method of analysis was used because some assumptions for parametric tests like the general assumption of normality and the assumption of homogeneity of variance were not met.

In addition, multiple regression analysis (MRA) was used in the analysis because the study had one continuous dependent variable which was academic work stress and two independent variables (predictor variables) which included psychological well-being and social life. The control variables were gender and whether one was living alone or with a partner or with a roommate. Dummy coding was done on the second control variable i.e. living status (alone, with partner or with a roommate) because it had more than two categories and the analysis was done using the “enter method” (Field, 2009), the baseline group in this study was whether one was alone. Furthermore, as a result of the presence of the control variables, the MRA was used so as to determine if the presence of control variables had an influence on the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life of students.
**Work Stress and Well-being**

In summary, the data analysis examines the following pathways; a) how academic work stress is related to psychological well-being of students; b) the relationship between academic work stress and social life of students; c) the relationship between academic work stress and psychological well-being when the control variables are included; and lastly d) the relationship between academic work stress and social life when control variables are present.

**Results of the study**

Descriptive analysis was performed as mentioned in the previous section and a reliability test was performed on all the scales so as to ascertain the reliability of the scales and the results showed that all the scales had acceptable Cronbach’s Alpha values as presented in the previous section. A preliminary analyses was performed so as ensure no violations of assumptions of parametric tests, however, some of the assumptions were not met hence the decision to perform a non-parametric correlation. The values of skewness and kurtosis (measures of distribution) for each variable were calculated so as to check for the assumption of normality and the results showed the data were not normally distributed because the values of skewness and kurtosis were further from zero. According to Field (2009; Pallant, 2006), the values of skewness and kurtosis in a normal distribution should be zero.

The demographic characteristics of the sample, mean scores, minimum and maximum values and standard deviation (SD) are presented in table 1 below; The inspection of the demographic characteristics of the sample indicated that the age of the respondents ranged from a minimum of 21 years to maximum of 39 years with a mean of 26,94. The mean for academic work stress was 42,37 with a standard deviation of 11,4. Additionally, the mean for psychological well-being was 43,56 with a standard deviation of 7,6 and lastly, social life had a mean of 20,55 with a standard deviation of 3,4. The means of academic work stress and psychological well-being were closer to each other as compared to the means of social life.

**Table 1.** Demographic characteristics of the total sample, Age, Mean, standard deviation

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>M</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Min</th>
<th>Max</th>
<th>N</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age</td>
<td>26,94</td>
<td>3,98</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Work stress</td>
<td>42,37</td>
<td>11,4</td>
<td>21</td>
<td>80</td>
<td>100</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Relationship between variables

Spearman’s correlation was used to answer the research question which aimed to find the relationship between different study variables among the sample i.e. academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life. The results of how academic work stress is related to psychological well-being showed a significant strong negative correlation between the variables ($r_s=-.448$, $p < .001$) which suggests that students who experienced a high level academic work stress, experienced a lower level of psychological well-being hence a high level of stress (academic) is associated negatively with a lower level of psychological well-being. Furthermore, the results on the relationship between academic work stress and social life showed a significant negative correlation between variables ($r_s=-.293$, $p < .001$) meaning that a high level of academic work stress is negatively correlated with a lower level of social life among students. According to Field (2013), a coefficient of $+1$ indicates a positive relationship which is perfect between variables, a coefficient of $-1$ indicates a perfect negative relationship and a coefficient of 0 indicates no linear relationships between variables at all. The above results are summarized in table 2 below:

**Table 2. Nonparametric Correlations**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Spearman’s rho</th>
<th>Work stress Correlation Coefficient</th>
<th>Work stress</th>
<th>Wellbeing</th>
<th>Social life</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Sig. (2-tailed)</td>
<td>.</td>
<td>.000</td>
<td>.003</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>N</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td>100</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Relationship between variables when the control variables are included**

A multiple regression analysis (MRA) was performed in order to find out the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life of students while controlling for gender and living status. Though the general assumptions
Work Stress and Well-being

of parametric tests for instance; normality and homogeneity of variance were not met as seen in the previous section, a preliminary analysis was done to ensure no violations of assumptions of multiple regression and the results showed that, the assumptions of linearity and homoscedasticity were met as the data in the graph showed randomly and evenly distributed points. The assumption of normality of residuals was also checked and it was met as the histogram looked like a normal distribution.

Using the enter method, it was found that there was a significant negative correlation between academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life of students (-.450 and -.181 respectively) as can be seen in table 3 below. In addition, results from ANOVA table indicated that the model fit well with a significant value of .000 which is less than 0.05 and results from the model summary showed $R^2_{\text{Adjusted}}=23\%$ & 31\% for model 1& 2 respectively meaning that 23\% of total variability in academic work stress is explained by psychological well-being and social life.

Lastly, controlling for the living status of the participants when determining the relationship between academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life of students had no significant influence on the above relationship, however, including gender as a control variable had a positive significant effect as seen in table 3 below.

Table 3. Coefficients

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Model</th>
<th>Unstandardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Standardized Coefficients</th>
<th>Sig.</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>B</td>
<td>Std.Error</td>
<td>Beta</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>(Constant)</td>
<td>80.370</td>
<td>7.708</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>QCwellbeing</td>
<td>-.659</td>
<td>.137</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>QDsocialinv</td>
<td>-.452</td>
<td>.332</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>alone vs with partner</td>
<td>-.222</td>
<td>2.296</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Alone vs roommate</td>
<td>-.2363</td>
<td>2.664</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Gender of</td>
<td>7.015</td>
<td>1.977</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

17
Discussion

The aim of this study was to investigate the relationship between academic work stress, well-being and the social life of university master students?” The main objective of the study was to look at how academic work stress relates to the well-being i.e. the psychological or emotional states of university master students as well as its relation social life i.e. the time spent enjoying oneself with friends/ the opportunity to do enjoyable things. The results from the spearmans correlation analysis showed the presence of a significant strong negative correlation between academic work stress and psychological well-being ($r_s=-.448$, $p<001$) and there was also a significant negative correlation ($r_s=-.293$, $p<001$) between academic work stress and social life of university master students.

The participants consisted of 100 masters students both male (N=56) and female (N=44) who were conveniently drawn from master students pursuing different master programmes in the university.

The first objective was to examine the nature of academic work stress. Looking at the theoretical literature presented in the beginning of this thesis, the nature of academic work stress could not be measured but was presented in the literature review and research literature shows that, stress is defined as being a person’s psychological and physiological response to the perception of demand and challenge (Ongori & Agolla, 2008). On the other hand, academic work stress refers to “the product of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual” (Wilks, 2008). However, it is important to note that, there is not much difference between stress, work stress and academic stress; the main differences that have been noted are on the settings or environment where this stress takes place and the related causes of the stress. Several sources of academic stress have been mentioned for example; studying for exams, complex assignments, failure to perform well in exams, lack of a support system, poor interaction with lecturers and colleagues among others and academic stress, just like general stress, is associated with both positive and negative effects on the lives and performance of individuals (Robbins et al., 2013; Busari, 2012). According to Rogers et al. (2012) “stress associated with the academic
Work Stress and Well-being

learning environment has been linked to depression, poor health, and poor academic performance” (p. 473).

In addition, the second objective focused on finding out the relationship between academic work stress and psychological well-being of university master students. The results of the spearman’s correlation indicated that academic work stress significantly correlated negatively with psychological well-being of students and an interpretation of these findings indicated that students who experience a high level of academic work stress are likely to have low level of psychological well-being. The above finding concurred with the research that indicated that in an academic setting, psychological well-being and stress do have a relationship. Rogers, Creed, and Searle (2012) found academic stress to be having a relationship with well-being among students and the results of their study suggested that students who appraised schools or academics as stressful and threatening displayed lower levels of well-being. Furthermore, though not confirmed in this study, my opinion suggests that, these findings could also mean that students who experience a low level of academic work stress are likely to have a high level of psychological well-being. The inclusion of living status as a control variable did not have an influence on the above relationship but including gender had a positive significant impact.

The third objective of this study was to find the relationship between academic work stress and the social life of university master students. A significant negative correlation between the above variables was found and an interpretation of this result showed that high academic work stress is negatively correlated with low levels of social life. This may be so because social life influences our mental health and well-being and research literature indicates that being in a supportive social network of family, friends and colleagues improves the general health and well-being of individuals and without positive as well as durable caring relationships there is a tendency for individual’s minds and bodies to fall apart especially when exposed to highly stressful situations (Heinrich & Gullone, 2006; Glozah, 2013). Additionally, though not confirmed in this study, my opinion suggests that, these findings could also mean that students who experience a low level of academic work stress are likely to have a high level of social life. In summary, just like the second objective, the inclusion of living status did not have an influence on the above relationship but including gender had a positive significant impact.
Work Stress and Well-being

Theoretical implications and future research

Some of the findings from this study have important theoretical implications as they are able to support previous research which has found a correlation between academic work stress and psychological well-being of students (Rogers et al, 2012). In addition, the results in this study show that academic stress should not be taken for granted because it can negatively impact the overall adjustments of students to their day to day activities (Busari, 2014).

Lastly, future research should focus considerable attention and effort to academic work stress research just like the way most scholars are preoccupied with research on work-related stress. This is so because there is not so much difference between stress, work stress and academic stress and some research have shown that there is a prevalence of stress among the graduate student population and it has been noted to interfere with the student’s academic outcomes, health and well-being (Nazione, Pace, Shugart & Smith, 2014).

Conclusion

The findings from this study contribute some knowledge to research on academic work stress, psychological well-being and social life as they demonstrate a negative correlation between the variables. Also, the study highlighted that stress just like academic stress has both positive and negative effects and if students are not able to effectively cope with the stressors, then the positive outcomes may be limited as they encounter more of the negative consequences of stress (Robbins et al., 2013; Busari, 2012). Lastly, stress whether emotional or physical, natural or man-made, public or private, exerts an influence in our lives (Morris, 1990).
Work Stress and Well-being

References


**Work Stress and Well-being**


**Work Stress and Well-being**


Dear student,

My name is Daniel Emaasit and this is a questionnaire in connection with my Master Thesis research work on work stress and well-being with particular focus on “academic work stress and its relation to the social life and well-being of university master students.

Below are some questions concerned with your studies and their relation to the above mentioned topic of interest. Please read each statement carefully and answer all questions as honestly as possible.

Your participation is of course voluntary. This is purely for research purpose and all the information will be kept confidential. I would be very grateful if You choose to participate.

Sincerely,

Daniel Emaasit

Master Student (Psychology, Work and Organizational Psychology)
Work Stress and Well-being

Questionnaire about stress, wellbeing and background information (mark with X where appropriate)

1. Age ...........

2. Gender  a) Male…..  b) Female……


4. What Master Programme do you study and how long is it?.................................

B. Stress questions: Fill in the number that you think fits Your response when You have been under stress

1- None of the time  2- A little of the time  3- Some of the time  4- Most of the time  5- All of the time

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I had trouble concentrating in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. I used alcohol or drugs</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I felt I was lazy when it came to university work</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I felt overwhelmed by the demands of study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. There is so much going on that I can’t think straight</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. My emotions stop me from studying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I have trouble remembering my notes</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. I avoided class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9. I couldn’t breathe</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10. I had headaches</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11. I procrastinated on my assignments</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12. I yelled at family or friends</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13. I felt worried about coping with my studies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>14. My hands were sweaty</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>15. I have had a lot of trouble sleeping</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>16. I was unable to study</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>17. I was distracted in class</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>18. I felt emotionally drained by the university</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Work Stress and Well-being

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>19. I felt emotional</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>20. My work built up so much that I felt like crying</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

C. Psychological well-being questions

Below are 8 statements with which you may agree or disagree. Using the 1-7 scale below, indicate your agreement with each item by indicating that response for each statement.

1-Strongly disagree 2- Disagree 3- Slightly disagree 4- Mixed or neither agree nor disagree 5- Slightly agree 6- Agree 7- Strongly agree

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
<th>7</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1. I live a purpose and meaningful life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. My social relationships are supportive and rewarding</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. I am engaged and interested in my daily activities</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4. I actively contribute to the happiness and well-being of others</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5. I am competent and capable in the activities that are important to me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6. I am a good person and live a good life</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7. I am optimistic about my future</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8. People respect me</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

D. Psychosocial and lifestyle questions.

On average, how often do you do each of the following? Please check the answer which shows how you feel about each statement.

1- Three or more times a week 2- Once or twice a week 3- Once or twice a month 4- Every few months 5- Once or twice a year 6- Less than once a year or never

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Item</th>
<th>1</th>
<th>2</th>
<th>3</th>
<th>4</th>
<th>5</th>
<th>6</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
Work Stress and Well-being

1. Meet up (include both arranged and chance meetings)
2. Speak on the phone
3. Write or email
4. Do enjoyable things alone or with friends or family

Thank you for your help with filling out the questionnaire.