



Effects of Self-Care on Undergraduate Stress

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PRIOR RESEARCH

- High levels of stress negatively impact cognitive efficiency and mental performance (Chapell et al., 2005; Eysenck et al., 2007; Quach, 2016; Seipp, 1991).
- Chronic, untreated stress can lead to lasting physical impairments of cerebral structures (Bourgin et al., 2015; Kolb, 2016; Sapolsky, 2004, 2005).
- Self-care practices are significantly correlated to perceived stress levels (Ayala, 2016; Colman et al., 2016; Myers et al., 2012; Orozco, 2015; Slonim et al., 2015).
- Most studies examining self-care have used graduate student samples. This may reduce the generalizability of past research as graduate students might display more acclimation to a stressful academic environment.
- The present study therefore examined the relationship between stress and self-care in an undergraduate student population.

METHOD

- 200 undergraduate college students (43 males, 156 females, $M_{age} = 21.22$, $SD = 6.42$) participated in this study.
- Participants completed an online survey that consisted of a demographic questionnaire, the Mindful Self-Care Scale (Cook-Cottone, 2014), and the Depression Anxiety Stress Scale (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995) 5 times over the course of the semester at weeks 3, 6, 9, 12, and 15 of the semester.
- Steps were taken to incentivize participants to ensure continued participation and to reduce attrition.

RESULTS

	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. T1 Stress	-									
2. T2 Stress	.628**	-								
3. T3 Stress	.630**	.815**	-							
4. T4 Stress	.613**	.765**	.787**	-						
5. T5 Stress	.641**	.668**	.713**	.793**	-					
6. T1 SC	-.264**	-.235**	-.214**	-.172*	-.155*	-				
7. T2 SC	-.288**	-.299**	-.297**	-.243**	-.212**	.685**	-			
8. T3 SC	-.205**	-.259**	-.307**	-.244**	-.207**	.621**	.672**	-		
9. T4 SC	-.0138	-.166*	-.208**	-.206**	-.2**	.575**	.679**	.757**	-	
10. T5 SC	-.0122	-.171*	-.155*	-.169*	-.214**	.591**	.669**	.713**	.764**	-
Mean	17.055	17.465	17.645	17.73	18.24	124.855	125.755	123.235	122.86	122.045
SD	11.779	12.386	13.115	13.291	13.487	20.275	19.455	22.01	20.773	22.959
Alpha	0.929	0.941	0.95	0.951	0.954	0.882	0.884	0.874	0.901	0.915

**p < .01; *p < .05

Table 1. Zero-order correlation coefficients, means, standard deviations, and internal consistency analyses for all variables across all time points.

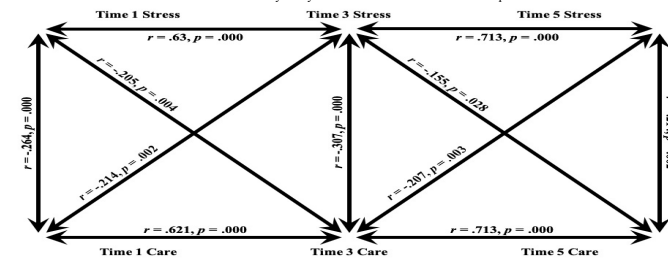


Figure 1. Cross-lagged panel design.

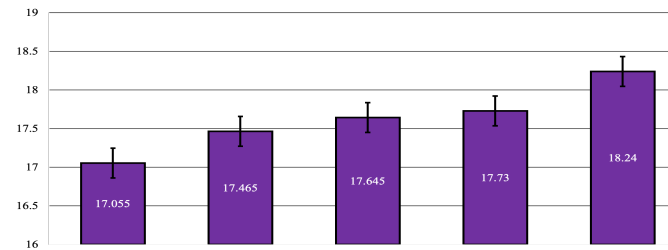


Figure 2-A. Trend analysis of mean self-care across all time points.

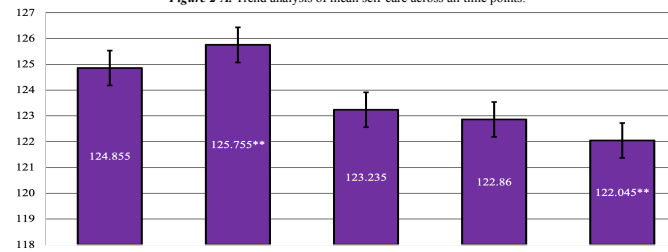


Figure 2-B. Trend analysis of mean stress across all time points.

DISCUSSION

- These results suggest that student predispositions to stress may predict self-care and that predispositions toward self-care may predict stress later in the semester. For instance, self-care measured at the beginning of the semester may predict stress at mid-terms and finals.
- The ability to predict which students may be predisposed to suffer from high stress can prove useful to colleges and universities.

LIMITATIONS

- As this study was exploratory, confirmatory research will need to be conducted to replicate and confirm these results.
- Although correlations between stress and self-care at different points were statistically significant, the amount of variance accounted for was approximately 2.5%. As a result, although stress and self-care are related, other factors account for variance in both variables.
- The sample was predominantly female, limiting the generalizability of these findings.
- Although efforts were made to reduce attrition, participant attrition was nearly 50%. However, post-hoc analyses did not reveal any significant differences between those who did and did not complete the study on the variables assessed.

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