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Academic Stress and Aggression. The Moderating Role of Social Support

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ABSTRACT

This study aimed to extend the results from the literature and investigate the moderating role of social support in the relationship between students' academic stress and aggressive behavior. The participants were 149 students, the majority being female (83%), ranging in age from 18 to 47 years. The instruments used were The Academic Stress Questionnaire, The Aggression Questionnaire, and The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support. Regression analyses indicate that academic stress partially predicts student aggression. More specifically, academic stress determined by personal factors is significantly and positively associated with only two dimensions of aggression, namely anger and hostility, and academic stress related to other people is significantly and positively associated exclusively with hostility. Also, social support does not significantly moderate the relationship between academic stress and aggression. The explanations regarding this inconsistency with the results of previous research cover various aspects such as: the influence of the culture and socio-economic status of the participants' country of origin, the impact of the predominantly Orthodox religion, accommodation with an online learning model as a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, the autonomous choice of higher education studies, the educational specialization in the distinct field of social sciences, but also the high percentage of responses from women, most of whom are in the final year of their undegraduate studies.

Keywords: *students, social support, academic stress, aggression*

1. INTRODUCTION

Education represents a continuous search for new knowledge through investigation, observation, feelings, emotions and words (Tripathy & Sharma, 2017), and higher education is a period of transition marked by the demands of the new environment (Wilks, 2008). It is really risky for students to allow the stress to become a way of life because

it can lead to academic failure (Kumar & Bhukar, 2013). A student's life is subject to various types of stressors, such as academic pressure given by strict performance criteria, by the obligation to succeed, an uncertain future caused by the need for a job for financial support and expected difficulties in integrating into the university system (Buote et al., 2007; Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006), as well as various interpersonal conflicts that materialize in disagreements, conflict, and social withdrawal (Kashani & Shepperd, 1990). Cumulatively with negative emotions such as fear, insecurity (Singh, 2019) and a sense of isolation (Buote et al., 2007), students come to face aggression (Zhou et al., 2017). However, some students are able to resolve problems and conflicts through less destructive ways, such as reasoning and discussion, which brings to the fore the contribution of social support (Kashani & Shepperd, 1990) from various sources, such as peers, tutors and parents, being vital for successful adaptation to university life (Tao et al., 2000) and for understanding the risk of emotional distress (Calvete & Connor-Smith, 2006).

Academic stress and agression

Challenges during adolescence can lead to feelings of insecurity and instability that result in a range of poor psychological and social outcomes (Upton, 2013) for some adolescents due to the adoption of specific strategies to cope with stress (Suldo et al., 2008). For students, positive social support and effective coping are essential to help them manage their stress. Students manage stress differently, they appraise stress, seek support from family and friends and cope in their own distinctive ways (Chao, 2011). Psychological outcomes refer to individual cognitive and behavioral processes and include internalization through emotional problems, depressive symptoms, anxiety, somatic accusations and externalization through aggression, conduct disorders, antisocial behaviors (Suldo et al., 2008).

Stress associated with academic performance is the main predictive factor for adolescents who are adopting aggression as a defensive mechanism, with the possibility of engaging in violent behavior against others (Park et al., 2014). The deep frustration that adolescents feel when their specific needs are not met influences expressions of aggression and may even lead them to give up everything (Park et al., 2014). Thus, both academic pressure and dissatisfaction with their studies increase the negative mood of teenagers in their daily routines and activities. This negative mood increases their desire to express anger and thus, commit acts of aggression. Therefore, the risk factors for aggression include dissatisfaction with one's profession, intense pressure to learn, child status, poor parental relationships, uncertain interpersonal relationships, punishment, subjective perception of minimal support, and insufficient use of received social support (Zhou et al., 2017).

Students in an advanced high school program perceived more stress than students in a regular general education program. Because perceived stress has also been associated with negative indicators of mental health, coping strategies that are positively correlated with perceived stress may place adolescents at an increased risk for experiencing negative consequences. As stress increases, those who use anger-specific coping strategies are more likely to experience problems on the external spectrum and experience internal disorders. This suggests that blaming and insulting others are not effective coping strategies for increasing stress because they serve to exacerbate its effect on socioemotional well-being among students. They should be discouraged from adopting an external locus of control, that is, blaming other people or offending them in order to minimize external forms of psychopathology (Suldo, et al., 2008).

Taking into account all of the above, we aim to analyze the relationships between academic stress and student aggression and we formulate the following hypothesis:

H1. *Academic stress is a significant positive predictor of aggression.*

H1a: *Academic stress is a significant positive predictor of physical aggression.*

H1b: *Academic stress is a significant positive predictor of verbal aggression.*

H1c: *Academic stress is a significant positive predictor of anger.*

H1d: *Academic stress is a significant positive predictor of hostility.*

The moderating role of social support on the relationship between academic stress and agression

Adolescents' social network is a major factor in predicting their aggression (Bandura et al., 2001). The adolescent who has a positive social network is able to adhere to a conforming social trend instead of an antisocial action. Therefore, social support is a major environmental resource for young people. Studies that have students as their target population suggest a significant negative correlation between aggression and so\cial support (Li et al., 2019). Therefore, improving life skills and increasing perceived social support can reduce aggression and promote mental health (Li et al., 2019) by increasing the effectiveness of coping efforts, which in turn decrease stress among students (Yasin, 2010). Individuals with strong social support systems are more resilient to the adverse effects of stressful stimuli because they are less likely to distinguish these stimuli as threatening and less inclined to respond to their interpersonal conflict with verbal or physical aggression (Kashani & Shepperd, 1990).

Social support has been found to be negatively correlated with aggression (Kumar & Bhuchar, 2014), suggesting that the higher the social support, the lower the perceived stress (Yasin, 2010). For college students, low social support is associated with various problems, namely parental divorce (Arria et al., 2009), lack of friends (Curran et al., 2010) or an inadequate social life (Sirgy et al., 2006). Students with low social support are more likely to engage in less healthy activities such as sedentary behavior, alcohol consumption, and excessive or insufficient sleep (Thorsteinsson & Brown, 2009). High social support could contribute to adolescents' problem-solving when faced with adversity and help them to reduce the manifestation of aggressive behaviors towards their peers (Mukhtar & Mahmood, 2018).

Social support enables some students to maintain relatively positive mental health despite stress (Chao, 2012), being associated with improved psychosocial outcomes such that negative consequences were reduced by 25%. Internalizing behaviours, i.e. depressive symptoms, psychological distress, anxiety symptoms, interpersonal stress, withdrawal, suicidal behaviour, social anxiety, stress, emotional problems and substance use (alcohol use, tobacco use, illicit drug use, general of substances) decreased by 25% when youth reported being supported. Moreover, social support was also associated with improved educational outcomes (i.e. academic proficiency, academic performance, educational engagement). In relation to these findings, social support provides a context in which adolescents can feel safe and supported within their social relationships, where they can have intimate discussions, experience genuine understanding and listening and receive emotional support (Heerde & Hemphill, 2018). Social support has a direct and positive relationship with college adjustment, with academic stress and social support together accounting for 59% of the variance in college adjustment (Solberg et al., 1994). The buffer effect and protective role of social support on psychological well-being in the context of social exclusion experiences is confirmed by the fact that increased social support from family, friends and school is associated with a higher level of psychological well-being for adolescents (Arslan, 2018).

The study conducted by Rawson et al. (1994) on undergraduate students indicated that both coping behavior and social support structures moderated the effects of academic stress among students. By mitigating the effect of stress, social support may reduce the use of negative disengagement coping strategies such as avoidance, withdrawal, and denial among college students. Holahan et al. (1995) found that first-year students with higher levels of perceived parental support were better adjusted and less stressed than those with lower levels of perceived parental support.

People with a high degree of social resources, i.e. others they can turn to in times of need, face fewer threats in response to conflict and thus, are less inclined to resolve disputes with verbal or physical aggression (Kashani & Shepperd, 1990). Acts of aggression increased dramatically as a result of increased community violence victimization when victims reported low perceived support from friends and high use of disengagement coping tactics. Thus, the lack of family influence suggests that friends may play a greater role in promoting or discouraging aggressive behavior in the age range between 18 and 22 years. It is possible that promoting violence in the community increases the risk of aggressive behavior, which then leads to social ostracism and perceived low support from friends. On the other hand, the perception of low support from friends can increase feelings of alienation and anger in victims, which increases their likelihood to behave aggressively. Therefore, young adults exposed to community violence are less aggressive when they have access to peer support (Scarpa & Haden, 2006). Another study indicates how social support from friends moderated the negative association between academic stress and student resilience, encouraging peer support as a means of promoting student well-being. In other words, the interaction between peer support and academic stress had a positive impact on resilience among social science education students (Wilks & Spivey, 2010).

The perception of social interaction plays an important role in the emergence of high-risk behaviors in adolescents, including aggression. Adolescents who have a positive perception of events have favorable behaviors, while adolescents who have a negative perception of situations exhibit high-risk behaviors. Because a high level of perceived social support in adolescents denotes a lower level of aggression, adolescents who have high perceived social support are less likely to be aggressive and will show more appropriate responses to the problems they face (Samadifard & Sadri Damirchi, 2018). Zaleski et al. (1998) observed that social support provided by friends was positively associated with adjustment to college life. The negative effect of academic stress on resilience was moderated by the interaction of friend support with stress (Wilks, 2008). Students' feelings of importance to faculty friends and the university environment were increased when they believed that other people in their lives showed interest in them, their goals, and their futures, when they were supported by members family, but also their friends at school. Thus, they experienced less academic stress.

Taking into account all of the above, we propose to analyze the moderating role of social support in the relationship between academic stress and aggression, thus we formulate the following hypothesis:

H2. *Social support moderates the relationship between academic stress and aggression.*

2. METHODOLOGY

Participants and procedure

In the present study participated 149 people, aged between 18 and 47, M = 22.38, AS = 5.23, of which 25 men (17%) and 124 women (83%). Regarding the year of study, 26 are in the first year (17%), 17 are in the second year (11%), and 106 are in the third year (72%), and concerning the marital status, 73 are single (49%) and 76 are in a relationship (51%). Inclusion criteria: participants must have student status. The sampling method is one of convenience. Out of a total of 200 people invited to participate in the study, only 149 agreed to participate to the end by completing the questionnaire (75%). Prior information was provided through social media networks, namely Instagram, Facebook, WhatsApp, including email. The study was carried out in a single stage, and the data were collected using a digital questionnaire, google forms type. The distribution of the questionnaire took place in a private format, for each individual. The participants were not rewarded for their participation. The research ethics conditions reffering to data processing and interpretation, as well as data security monitoring, were met.

Instruments

Sociodemographic variables were collected through a list of questions with reference to gender, age, university year and marital status.

Academic stress was measured with the Academic Stress Questionnaire (Wycliffe Yumba, 2008). The instrument includes 33 items and measures several dimensions, namely stress related to other people, stress related to personal factors, stress determined by academic factors and stress determined by environmental factors.

Answers are given on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 – strongly disagree and 5 – strongly agree. The scores are obtained by summing the scores of each item (Participation in work teams with colleagues whom I do not know enough/Too many study hours).

Aggression was measured with the Aggression Questionnaire (Buss & Perry, 1992). The instrument comprises 29 items and measures several dimensions such as physical aggression, verbal aggression, anger and hostility. Answers are given on a five-point Likert scale, where 1 – does not describe me at all and 5 – describes me exactly. Scores are obtained by summing the scores of each item (If I have to resort to violence to defend my rights, I will/ I can't help but argue with others when they disagree with me).

Social support was measured with the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (Zimet et al., 1988). The instrument includes 12 items and measures several dimensions, more specific, support from family, social support from friends and social support from significant others. Answers are given on a seven-point Likert scale, where 1 – strongly disagree and 7 – strongly agree. Scores are obtained by summing the scores of each item (I get the emotional support I need from my family/ I can count on my friends when things are not going well).

Research design

The present study has a cross-sectional, descriptive, correlational design. The statistical analysis program IBM.SPSS.24 (IBM Corp, 2016) and the medmod module from Jamovi (The jamovi project, 2022) were used to organize the data and test the hypotheses. .

3. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics

Table 1. *Descriptive statistics*

	M	AS	α	ASOP	ASPF	ASAF	ASEF	SSFa	SSFr	SSOs	AGPh	AGVe	AGAn	AGHo
SACP	16.69	4.59	.65	1										
SAFP	29.43	6.60	.71	.65**	1									
SAFA	26.99	7.69	.84	.51**	.61**	1								
SAFM	16.04	5.56	.73	.52**	.59**	.67**	1							
SSFa	20.64	6.51	.92	-.31**	-.32**	-.27**	-.30**	1						
SSPr	21.44	6.36	.95	-.26**	-.22**	-.13	-.32**	.30**	1					
SSPs	23.66	5.99	.96	-.15	-.12	-.12	-.28**	.36**	.44**	1				
AGFi	15.24	6.17	.82	.19*	.18*	.05	.18*	-.05	-.12	-.02	1			
AGVe	13.26	3.78	.68	.27**	.24**	.19*	.17*	-.07	-.07	-.05	.58**	1		
AGFu	17.94	6.07	.81	.31**	.41**	.22**	.25**	-.04	-.04	.00	.50**	.67**	1	
AGOs	21.77	7.18	.83	.58**	.53**	.42**	.43**	-.25**	-.31**	-.11	.38**	.45**	.55**	1

Note: **. p < .01, *. p < .05
ASOP = academic stress related to other people, ASPF = academic stress related to personal factors, ASAF = academic stress related to academic factors, ASEF = academic stress related to environmental factors, SSFa = social support from family, SSFr = social support from friends, SSOs = social support from significant others, AGPh = physical aggression, AGVe = verbal aggression, AGAn = anger, AGHo = hostility

Skewness and kurtosis are in the (-2, 2) range, which reflects a normal distribution of the data. There were no missing cases and no cases were removed from any of the statistical analyses.

Hypoteses testing

In order to test this H1 hypothesis, four multiple linear regression analyzes were performed, with the four types of academic stress as predictors and, alternatively, the four types of aggression as dependent variables.

Table 2. *Multiple linear regression analysis for academic stress as a predictor of physical aggression*

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
ASOP	.16	.15	.12	1.11	.27
ASPF	.11	.11	.12	.98	.33
ASAF	-.16	.09	-.20	-1.73	.09
ASEF	.20	.13	.18	1.58	.12

Note: R^2 = .07; ASOP = academic stress related to other people, ASPF = academic stress related to personal factors, ASAF = academic stress related to academic factors, ASEF = academic stress related to environmental factors

It is observed that the four types of academic stress are responsible for 7% of the variation in physical aggression, the regression equation being statistically significant, F(4, 144) = 2.56, p < .05. However, none of the types of academic stress were significantly associated with physical aggression.

Table 3. *Multiple linear regression analysis for academic stress as a predictor of verbal aggression*

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
ASOP	.15	.09	.19	1.73	.09
ASPF	.06	.07	.10	.86	.39
ASAF	.03	.06	.05	.45	.66
ASEF	-.02	.08	-.03	-.25	.81

Note: R^2 = .08; ASOP = academic stress related to other people, ASPF = academic stress related to personal factors, ASAF = academic stress related to academic factors, ASEF = academic stress related to environmental factors

It is observed that the four types of academic stress are responsible for 8% of the variation in verbal aggression, the regression equation being statistically significant, F(4, 144) = 3.15, p < .05. However, none of the types of academic stress were significantly associated with verbal aggression.

Table 4. *Multiple linear regression analysis for academic stress as a predictor of anger*

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
ASOP	.12	.14	.09	.85	.40
ASPF	.35	.10	.38	3.37	.00
ASAF	-.06	.09	-.08	-.69	.49
ASEF	.03	.12	.03	.23	.82

Note: R^2 = .17; ASOP = academic stress related to other people, ASPF = academic stress related to personal factors, ASAF = academic stress related to academic factors, ASEF = academic stress related to environmental factors

It is observed that the four types of academic stress are responsible for 17% of the variation in anger, the regression equation being statistically significant, F(4, 144) = 7.48, p < .05. Among the four types of academic stress, only stress determined by personal factors is positively associated with anger, β = .38, t(149) = 3.37, p < .01.

Table 5. *Multiple linear regression analysis for academic stress as a predictor of hostility*

| Model | Unstandardized coefficients | | Standardized coefficients | | |
	B	Std. Error	β	t	Sig.
ASOP	.61	.14	.39	4.35	.00
ASPF	.21	.11	.20	2.01	.04
ASAF	.05	.09	.05	.58	.57
ASEF	.10	.12	.08	.82	.41

Note: R^2 = .38; ASOP = academic stress related to other people, ASPF = academic stress related to personal factors, ASAF = academic stress related to academic factors, ASEF = academic stress related to environmental factors

It is observed that the four types of academic stress are responsible for 38% of the variation in hostility, the regression equation being statistically significant, $F_{(4, 144)}$ = 22.43, $p < .05$. Among the four types of academic stress, only two are significantly positively associated with hostility, namely stress related to other people, $β = .39$, $t(149) = 4.35$, $p < .01$ and stress determined by personal factors, $β = .20$, $t(149) = 2.01$, $p < .05$.

In order to test H2 hypothesis, a series of moderation analyzes were carried out with stress determined by personal factors and stress determined by other people as predictors, alternatively, with anger and hostility as dependent variables, alternatively, and with the three forms of social support, namely from family, friends and significant others as moderating variables, alternatively. We removed from the statistical analyzes those variables that did not correlate significantly with each other.

The results showed that social support from family does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by personal factors and anger, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .00, CI95%(-.02, .02), Z = .22, p = . 83. Also, social support from friends does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by personal factors and anger, the moderation estimate being non-significant, b = .00, CI95%(-.02, .02), Z = .43, p = . 67. Social support from significant others does not moderate the relationship

between stress caused by personal factors and anger, the moderation estimate being non-significant, b = .01, CI95%(-.02, .03), Z = .54, p = .59. Social support from the family does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by personal factors and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .01, CI95%(-.02, .03), Z = .44, p = . 66. Social support from friends does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by personal factors and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .02, CI95%(-.00, .04), Z = 1.72, p = .09. Social support from significant others does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by personal factors and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .00, CI95%(-.00, .05), Z = 1.71, p = . 09. Social support from the family does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by other people and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .00, CI95%(-.03, .03), Z = .20, p = . 84. Social support from friends does not moderate the relationship between stress caused by other people and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .00, CI95%(-.00, .02), Z = .04, p = . 97. Social support from significant others does not moderate the relationship between stress determined by other people and hostility, the moderation estimate being insignificant, b = .01, CI95%(-.02, .02), Z = .61, p = .54.

4. DISCUSSION

Contrary to our expectations, the results from this study indicate a partial effect of academic stress on student aggression. More specifically, academic stress related to personal factors is significantly positively associated with only two dimensions of aggression, namely anger and hostility, and academic stress caused by other people is significantly positively associated exclusively with hostility. Thus, a possible explanation is the cultural influences of the Eastern European region, which also includes Romania, the country of origin of participants. The need for social support in the Romanian collectivist society can be viewed from two contradictory perspectives that, paradoxically, complement each other. Thus, living in a culture where members' membership in a group is based on deep identification with others and respect for authority to maintain safety, and

social support is automatically perpetuated without a clear awareness of its lack, so nor of its impact on the individual, in particular, causes, simultaneously, a reluctance and even refusal to seek help from those close to them because there is a possibility that the individual anticipates the emergence of a feeling of obligation on the part of others towards him. One's decision to seek social support depends largely on how the person expects others to react to such an expressed need. Culture can influence social support transactions and expectations of possible harm to the helper (Kim et al., 2006).

Another explanation for the given results can be represented by the historical period through which these students had to go for 2 years. The Covid-19 pandemic has caused unprecedented changes in their educational environment, and more than half of their academic career has been under the influence of online learning. In a study on the effects of the online learning environment, 70% of

responding teachers stated that there was a lack of social interaction among students in online courses because clear monitoring and direct interaction were lacking in such courses. Most felt that there were many consequences of the lack of social interaction in online courses during the Covid-19 pandemic, as a low number of students attended these courses regularly, they used their mobile phones for purposes other than study, there was low teacher appreciation and lack of attention from them because they could not always observe their facial expressions, group study was more complicated and students became bored and also reluctant to share their ideas and perspectives with teachers and peers, also taking into account the fact that the exams took place in an online format, so they had enough resources available to copy (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022). Over half of the student sample in the study by Ghafari et al. (2021) reported the presence of mental disorders symptoms, being a higher percentage than that analyzed in other research in the field, in the pre-COVID-19 period. The most common symptoms reported were changes in sleep patterns and the presence of anxiety. In another very recent research, the majority of first-year students reported that the online learning environment conditioned the perception of a high workload, difficulties in understanding and organizing learning materials, and a loss of learning interactions with their classmates and also teachers. All of these aspects contributed to a universally difficult study experience for these students, affecting their ability to receive help from their peers and amplifying difficulties in organizing and managing study materials online (Warshawski, 2022). The physical presence of the teacher also has a great effect on student satisfaction (Azmat & Ahmad, 2022). Therefore, it is possible that both their educational and social needs have undergone adjustments depending on the presence or absence of the ability and opportunity to meet them. Because of the long period of time, these students have been isolated from their social interactions, excluding family ones, it is likely that they have adjusted to the lack of social support in the academic setting or have acquired some tolerance for loneliness in respecting their academic commitment.

The participation of a considerable number of students in the third year compared with those in other years of study, representing the majority of respondents, can attest to the importance of academic experience in terms of familiarization with the environment and educational requirements, and consequently, these students feel academic stress at a reduced level. Thus, the need to receive social support remains in a balanced range, which cannot influence the relationship between academic stress and aggression. The first semester of freshman year of college is exciting and challenging, often accompanied by leaving home, changes in family relationships, new academic demands, financial stress, and experiences of risky behaviors such as alcohol consumption (Galambos et al., 2009). First year students have been shown to experience a higher degree of academic stress compared to third year students (Singh & Upadhyay, 2008). Older

students reported improved time management skills compared to younger students because they learned and successfully adopted coping behaviors in limited time, which in turn leads to less academic stress and anxiety. Academic stress is amplified in first-year students because they are less experienced academically, have a low level of maturity and are significantly more affected by academic stress (Khan et al., 2013). Furthermore, along with the opportunity to have social interactions with school mentors over a longer period, older students were able to use certain active coping strategies such as positive reframing, acceptance and planning more effectively compared to younger students (Al-Dubai et al., 2011). Additionally, Bandura's (2001) efficacy source theory states that prior experience is one of the factors that influence an individual's perceived self-efficacy, and prior college entrance exam preparation by the first-year students in this study could explain the low degree of perceived academic stress.

Practical implications

Specialized studies in this field suggest that the possibility of having access to various sources of social support such as family, friends, colleagues from the faculty and teachers contribute to a favorable adaptation to the educational demands and, implicit, to the relief of academic stress. It is also clear that, for many, the social changes of recent years in post-communist Europe have fundamentally undermined previously existing patterns of social relations, and the societies concerned present a considerable need for counseling in this transition (Goodwin, 2006). With this in mind, it is recommended to encourage students to seek help by implementing psychoeducational programs that promote mental health in the general population. Interventions aimed at promoting active coping may enhance students' social network help-seeking abilities and may be associated, both directly and indirectly, with a more positive college experience (Zea et al., 1995). Consistent with the fact that the choice of enrolling in higher education is determined by the institution's quality standards, well-specialized teachers, the academic atmosphere, the availability of financial aid, infrastructure and teaching/learning facilities (Rico-Briones & Bueno, 2019), improving curricula by including extracurricular activities could enhance students' emotional well-being and their sense of accomplishment to counteract burnout (Jacobs & Dodd, 2003). Therefore, the establishment of curricular and extracurricular programs can be useful in helping young people to mitigate even latent aggressive tendencies, which are not expressed quite obviously or directed towards outsiders.

Limitation and future research

It is fair to point out certain limitations that should be taken into account in evaluating the results of this research. Regarding the gender of the participants, a small number of male respondents completed the questionnaire, and in the future, an approximately equivalent selection in number compared with female participants could represent an improvement in the validity of the results and, by default, a

greater possibility of generalization. Moreover, a greater diversity regarding the field of study chosen by the students, but also the affiliation of the faculty regarding the state/private polarity in which they study is imperative for a more accurate highlighting of the consequences of academic stress. Also, the only inclusion criterion in this study is the student status, which each participant has, and it is recommended that further research impose more varied and stricter participant selection criteria which, moreover, may have an impact major from the perspective of access to social support appropriate to the needs in the context of academic stress. Thus, the additional introduction of a much more specific and personal aspect such as the sexual orientation or the religious affiliation of the participants could significantly modify the results of such a study.

Conclusion

The current research aimed to investigate the role of social support on the relationship between academic stress and aggression from the subjective perspective of psychology students, a social science field. The results of the present study are inconsistent with the literature, supporting the fact that social support does not moderate the relationship between academic stress and aggression. Arguments regarding this difference cover various aspects such as the influence of the culture and socio-economic status of the country in which this research was conducted, the exceptional historical period that students experienced regarding online learning during the Covid-19 pandemic, the choice of a higher education congruent with their own desires, the distinct educational field of social sciences in which they study and even the preponderance of the female gender of the participants, most of them being in the final year of their studies for the bachelor's degree. An in-depth analysis of future data is recommended for better validity of the results, taking into account the increase in the number of male participants and the choice of varied fields of study in higher education, together with a firmer selection of respondents using criteria of stricter inclusion.

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