

Stress Experiences of University Students and Islamic Resilience Strategies



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Abstract

Stress is a common feeling of tension that arises from difficult situations, events, challenges, or demands, often accompanied by a sense of pressure or threat, such as meeting deadlines. In academic settings, students frequently encounter various stressors due to different circumstances. The objectives of the study were to identify the stress level among university students, find the causes of stress through interviews, and then apply Islamic Strategies as an Intervention. The study was delimited to M.Phil students studying at the University of Science and Technology, Bannu. This study employed a Concurrent Embedded Mixed Method design. Stressed students were identified using a portion of the DASS-21 scale specifically related to stress. Only five students at the M.Phil. level had a moderate level of stress, who were the participants of the study. After identifying these students, they were asked to complete an interview protocol to uncover the causes of their stress at the university. Following this, a two-week intervention focused on Islamic resilience strategies was implemented, during which data were recorded. After the intervention, the DASS-21 results for the stressed students returned to normal levels, demonstrating the effectiveness of the Islamic resilience strategies.

Key Words

Stress, University Students, Islamic Resilience Strategies, Experiences, Intervention

Introduction

Stress is a part of human life while gradually becoming a difficult situation to survive from within life, but it deeply affects individuals' lives. Güçlü (2001) describes this situation as the problems brought about by various economic, social, and technological changes the individual faces daily. According to Deniz and Yılmaz (2005), stress is expressed as a concept stemming from the incompatible relationship between the personal and the environment.

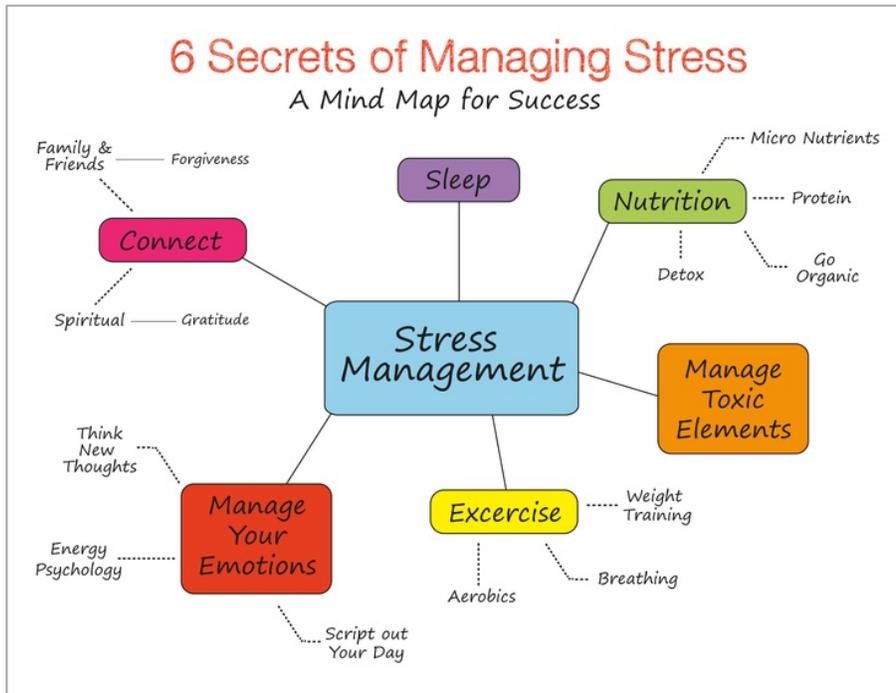
Senarath, (2020) conducted a study in which Exam stress was identified due to heavy workload, parental pressure, learning difficulty and low marks. Coping strategies were social support and engaging in religious activities.

Reis, et al. (2021) surveyed over 3200 students in Australian Universities in which students recommended task oriented pro-active coping strategies is best to engage themselves.

Sari, (2023) wrote in a book about coping Academic stress using spiritual approaches to improve student resilience. Students' experiences were explored by Phenomenological research by taking interview of 10 students. Three Coping strategies to deal with academic stress were: Positive thinking, Positive action and Positive hoping.

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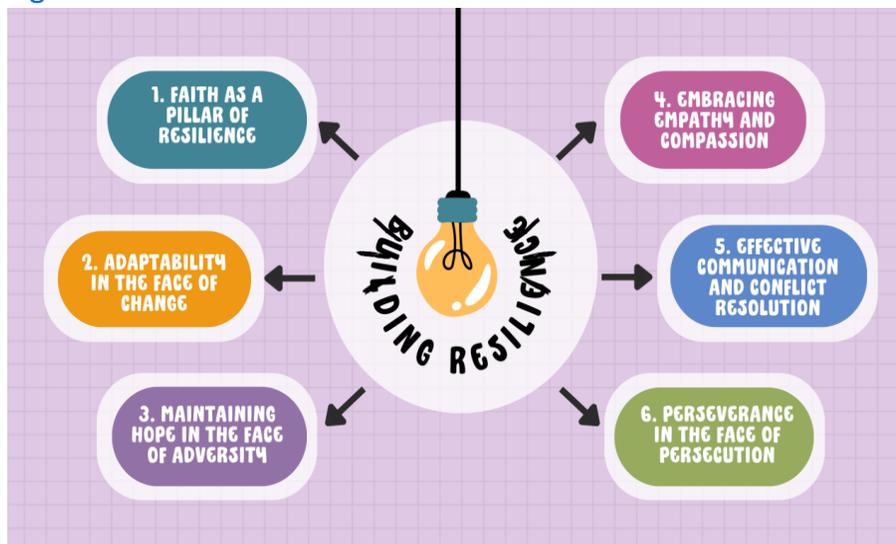
Figure 1



Source: <https://thewrightinitiative.com/misc/ambient-stress-examples.html>

Islamic Resilience Strategies

Figure 2



Source: <https://ummahconnects.com/timeless-lessons-from-the-life-of-prophet-muhammad-pbuh/>

"Eat those good things which are provided to you by Allah" Al-Quran (2:172)

"And We send down of the Quran that which is a healing and a mercy to those who believe" (Quran, Surah Al-Isra, 17:82)

We can identify what foods are beneficial; including honey (16: 68-69), vegetables such as corn and herbs and fruits such as olives, dates, grapes, pomegranates), and bananas.

“Eat and drink and do not commit excesses; indeed He does not love those who are excessive” Quran (7:31).

“It is only in the remembrance of God that hearts are comforted” (Al- Quran 13:28)

Physical Exercises during the Lifetime of the holy Prophet:

In the books of Seerah, it is mentioned that the Prophet (SAW) was in favor of sports competitions and was arranging the following competitions:

1. Running Competition among Adults
2. Running Competition among Children
3. Horse Racing
4. Wrestling
5. Shooting
6. Swimming

Allah likes cleanliness and purity. Quran (4:43) stresses cleanliness of body and mind. Prophet Mohammad (SAW) stressed brushing teeth with Miswak on daily basis.

The Prophet's life was full of recommendations for outdoor exercise. He advised all Muslims to teach their children swimming, archery, and horse riding.

The Prophet (Peace Be Upon Him) has advised to use Barley to cure for sadness. It relieves some of the sorrow and grief and gives rest to heart”. (Bukhari 7:71#593)

Apple juice vinegar would assist with fighting against depression since it is an incredible medium to help detoxify and cleanse the liver. Prophet Muhammad (SAW) used to have vinegar with olive oil.

“Honey is a remedy for every illness and the Qur’an is a remedy for all illness of the mind, therefore I recommend to you remedies, the Qur’an and honey”. (Bukhari)

“And a tree that grows out of Mount Sinai which produces oil and a condiment for those who eat. For olive oil is the supreme seasoning”. (Qur’an 24:35)

“The black seed (Kalonji) can heal every disease, except death”.

ANJIR significantly lowered the serum antioxidant enzyme and lipids (total cholesterol triglycerides, and free fatty acid) levels to near normal.

Quran recitation and listening can be applied as a useful non-pharmacological treatment to reduce anxiety, stress, and depression (Moulaei, et al. 2023).

Objectives of the Study

The following were the objectives of this study:

1. To identify the level of Stress and Depression among students within the organizational climate at the university level by using DASS-21.
2. To elicit the causes of stress experiences of students at their study place and suitable Islamic coping strategies at the university level.
3. To intervene in the Islamic resilience strategies to reduce stress levels among university students.

Research Questions

1. What is the level of Stress identified among students within the organizational climate at the university level by using DASS-21?

2. How students did express their stress experiences at their study place at the university level?
3. What Islamic Coping strategies for stress were used by students and their results?

Delimitation of the Study

Due to limited time only students of the University of Science and Technology, Bannu were the study's respondents.

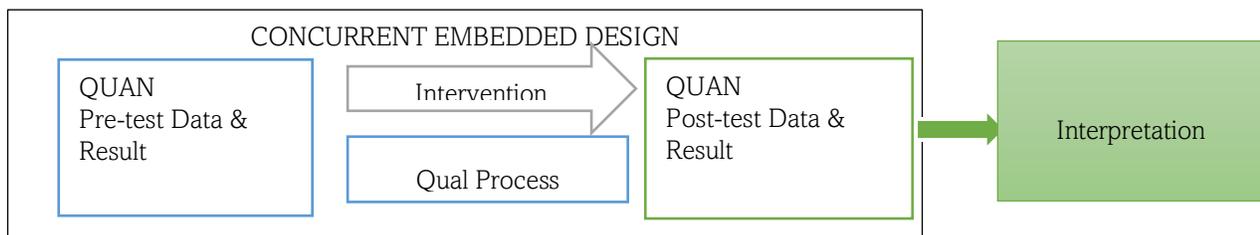
Methodology

Research Design

This research was both qualitative and quantitative in nature and a Concurrent Embedded Mixed method research design was followed to record the experiences of students and then Islamic Intervention was followed at University level.

Figure 3

Concurrent Embedded Mixed Method Design



One group design was used for Intervention among university students only and Phenomenological research design was used to elicit study experiences of university students at their study climate.

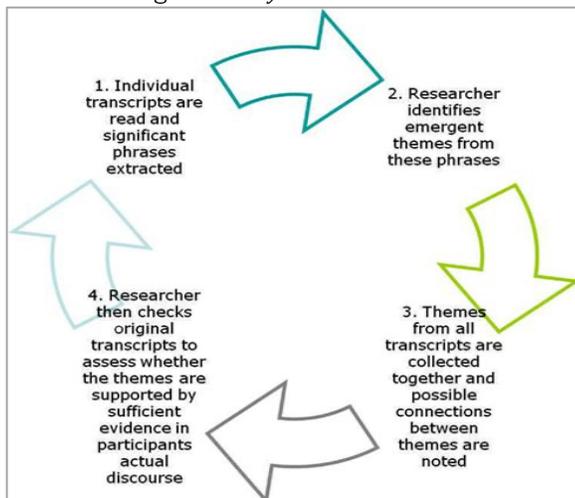
Figure 4

One Group Design



Figure 5

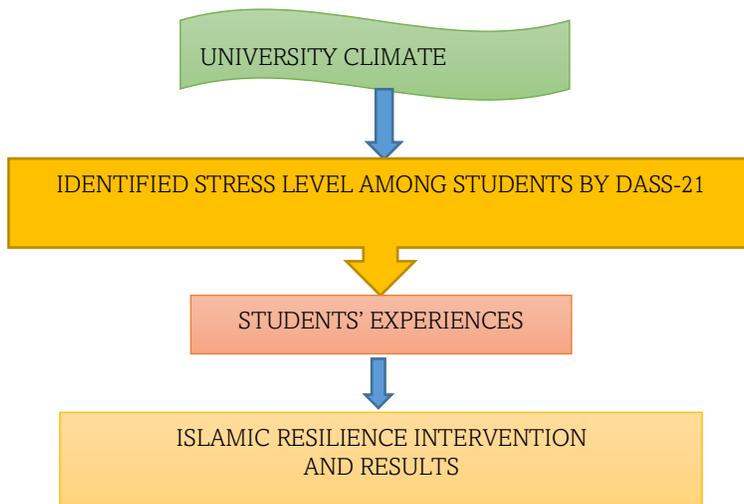
Phenomenological Analysis



Conceptual Framework

Figure 6

Conceptual Framework of Study



Participants

Students of the University of Science and Technology, Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa were participants in this study.

Sampling

The nested sampling technique was employed for this study. According to Onwuegbuzie and Leech (2007), the minimum suggested sample size is at least three participants per subgroup. The DASS-21 questionnaire was distributed among university students, resulting in only **five students** who reported high levels of stress and agreed to provide data from selected universities.

Research Instrument

- ▶ The DASS-21 scale was used to identify students' stress levels
- ▶ Self-developed Interview Protocol was developed separately for students based on relevant literature review.
- ▶ Intervention based on Islamic resilience strategies to reduce stress.

First, DASS-21 was adapted as only 7 items for identifying stress levels. After finding the level (at least moderate level), data was collected in form of open ended interview protocols. Islamic Resilience Intervention is intervened among university students in Ramadan for two weeks. DASS-21 was run as a Posttest to find the effect of Islamic Resilience strategies on university students.

DASS-21

Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale was developed by Lovibond and Lovibond (1995) and is widely used in different countries. Its original version consists of 42 items (DASS) and, its brief version, 21 items (DASS-21) that are divided into three correlated dimensions (Gomez, 2013; Osman et al., 2012). The first of these dimensions, called stress, assesses the presence of negative effects, depressed mood, insomnia, discomfort, and irritability, which can be present in depressive and anxious situations. The second, called depression, refers to the presence of depressive symptoms such as self-depreciation, devaluation of life, and hopelessness. The third, called anxiety,

assesses somatic tension and hyperactivity (Patias, et al., 2016). This scale is standardized and the reliability scores of the scales in terms of Cronbach's alpha scores rate the Depression scale at 0.91, and the Stress scale at 0.90 in the normative sample (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

DASS-21 scale was used as a Pre-test to identify the level of Stress and Depression among university teachers and students and used as a Post-test to check the level of stress and depression among university students after using Islamic resilience strategies.

Dass Score

	Stress
Normal	0 – 7
Mild	8 – 9
Moderate	10 – 12
Severe	13 – 16
Extremely Severe	17+

Interview Protocol

An interview Protocol was used by the researcher to know the causes of stress among students and it was also asked that which Islamic resilience strategies, they usually use in their daily lives to cope with such disorders. There were 12 items in each Interview Protocol.

Intervention Procedure

There was a checklist developed based on Islamic resilience strategies based on Literature review. Duration of Intervention was of two weeks i.e. from 4th March, 2024 to 16th March, 2024. 18 Resilience strategies were selected for this study. Students were asked to use it in their routine life and benefit of Ramadan was also taken for this study.

Ethical Consideration

The following ethical considerations were prioritized.

- ▶ Informed consent was obtained from the students about purpose and procedure of the study before including them in the study.
- ▶ Confidentiality and anonymity were coded to protect the identity of the participants.

Data Collection

Data was collected from students by personally visiting various departments of University of Science and Technology, Bannu, Khyber Pakhtunkhwa or through electronic media.

Data Analysis

Collected data were recorded, transcribed, and tabulated. Coding, sub-themes, and themes were emerged/generated from the data. Interpretative Phenomenological Analysis was followed to analyze the data. The data of interview was coded and generating themes manually.

Trustworthiness of the Study

Ensuring trustworthiness in research on my current research topic, is crucial for the credibility of your study. Here are some strategies to enhance trustworthiness:

Strategies used for trustworthiness were.

- ▶ Member checking
- ▶ Thick, rich descriptions
- ▶ Clarifying Research biasness

Researcher validated their findings by consulting study participants to ensure accuracy. Member checking is a method where researchers invite one or more participants to verify the accuracy of the transcript. This process includes presenting the findings to participants and seeking their input through written communication or interviews to assess the accuracy of the report.

Providing a detailed and comprehensive description of the setting, participants, and themes in a qualitative study, known as thick and rich description, which is another method to enhance the credibility of the research.

Being part of that area, researcher had insight for the problems and was objective and had rational thinking regarding the problem.

Result And Discussion

Table 1

List of Stressed students

S. No.	Code	Level of Study	Level of Stress
1	St-1(AS)	M.Phil	Moderate
2	St-2(NG)	M.Phil	Moderate
3	St-3(SK)	M.Phil	Moderate
4	St-4(AM)	M.Phil	Moderate
5	St-5(MN)	M.Phil	Severe

Response of Stressed Students

Theme 1

Stress Experiences

Q. 1. *Can you describe your experience with stress during your time at university?*

“I was stressed about starting university at the beginning. Presentations, assignment deadlines and exams days, the whole situation is very stressful for me.” **(St-1)**

“In stress my mind didn’t work at all very basic things slipped at my brain.” **(St-2)**

“As an over thinker, it was not a good experience.” **(St-3)**

“I didn’t feel stress because I am student but one stress I feel, no transport.” **(St-4)**

“I feel stress due to research work as it is difficult without electricity and net facility.” **(St-5)**

Q. 2. *What are some of the biggest sources of stress for you as a university students?*

“Presentations and assignments” **(St-1)**

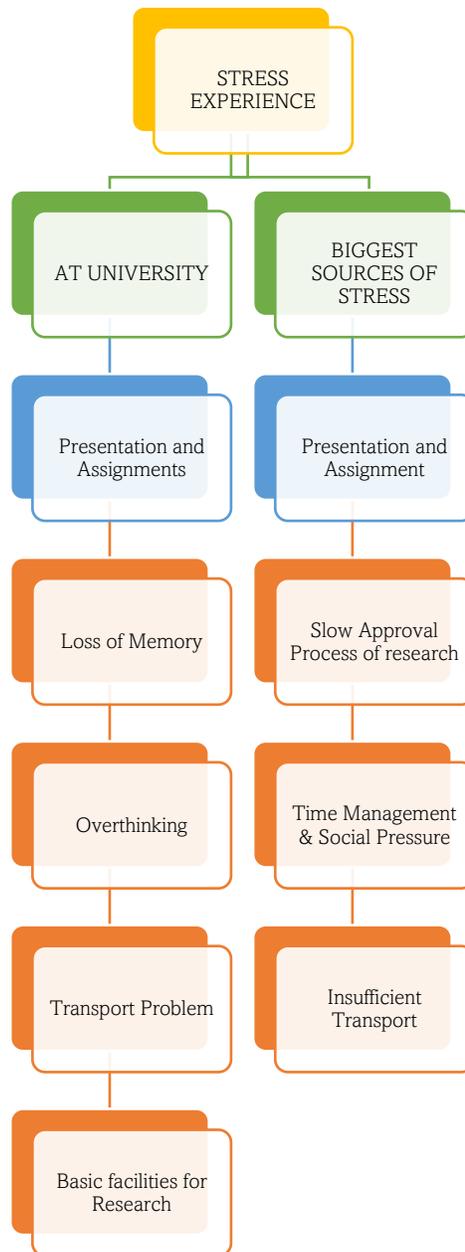
“Sources that make me stressed are getting good respectable job with handsome salary, slow process of university administration, and to get good grade in master along with good thesis.” **(St-2)**

“Time management, Grades, social pressure, future uncertainty.” **(St-3)**

“Insufficient transport.” **(St-4)**

“Manage work with time allocated along with home responsibilities.” **(St-5)**

Figure 7
Stress Experiences by students



Theme 2
University Contribution

Q. 4. Do you feel that the university provides adequate resources to help students manage stress?

“As far as my experience with the university is concerned, it doesn't provide adequate resources to help students to manage stress .It should organized recreational activities (trip, functions, food mela, etc.) for the students.” (St-1)

“No I don’t think that the university provides adequate resources to help students manage stress.” (St-2)

“Not at all.” (St-3)

“Yes, but insufficient.” (St-4)

“No, I don’t think so.” (St-5)

Q. 5. *Have you ever sought help for stress related concerns at the university? If so, what was your experience like?*

“No, I didn't.” (St-1)

“No, there is no helpdesk for stress related concerns at my university.” (St-2)

“Yes, it was a good experience.” (St-3)

“No” (St-4)

“No, due to respectable distance, communication gap, I never talk or seek help for stress related concerns at the university.” (St-5)

Q. 6. *Do you feel that the university is doing enough to prioritize the mental health and well-being of its students?*

“No, I don't think so.” (St-1)

“No, I don't feel that the university is doing enough to prioritize the mental health and well-being of its students.” (St-2)

“No” (St-3)

“Yes, but insufficient.” (St-4)

Q. 8. *Have you noticed any changes in your mental health since starting university?*

“Yes, I have noticed that I am more stressful than ever before but this is just because of my busy schedule. The university contributes on 30%.” (St-1)

“Yes, mental health change time to time as per situation.” (St-2)

“A lot.” (St-3)

“Yes, I am feeling a positive change in my mental health.” (St-4)

“Yes, Stress is increased with research work as it is difficult.” (St-5)

Q. 10. *Is there anything the university could do to better support students who are struggling with stress?*

“The overall approach of the university is materialistic. So it doesn't care for the students that much .but if the university arranges trips, functions, etc. it could better support the students.” (St-1)

“Yes, university can do a lot to support students who are struggling with stress.” (St-2)

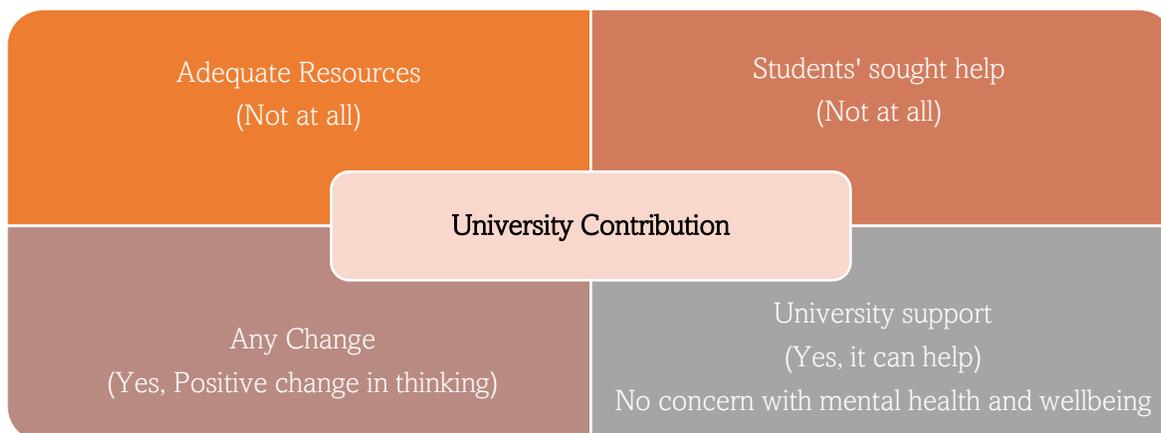
“At least universities should conduct stress management classes for their students.” (St-3)

“Yes, we have cooperative teachers.” (St-4)

“Timely work and regular meeting with supervisor regarding research can be helpful.” (St-5)

Figure 8

University Contribution



Theme 3

Personal Efforts/ Support

Q. 7. *How do you balance your academic responsibilities with other aspects of your life, such as work or personal relationships?*

“Well, even though it's hard to manage equilibrium between academic and personal relationships, yet best management can save us from being in stressful situations.” (St-1)

“I have made a timetable for my daily life routine. I give time to every activity. During the daytime, I prefer to study and do research papers to get a scholarship in some developed country, and my elder brother supports me financially. While, at night I spent time with family.” (St-2)

“It was a difficult task for me which I always fail to complete. One of the reasons for my stress was time management.” (St-3)

“Yes, it is difficult.” (St-4)

“I try my level best to balance my academic responsibilities with personal life.” (St-5)

Q. 9. *What are some of the strategies you use to stay motivated and focused during periods of high stress?*

“I try to have sound sleep, eat healthy food, drink lots of water, and take exercise during periods of high stress. I try to think positively.” (St-1)

“I become punctual in Namaz.” (St-2)

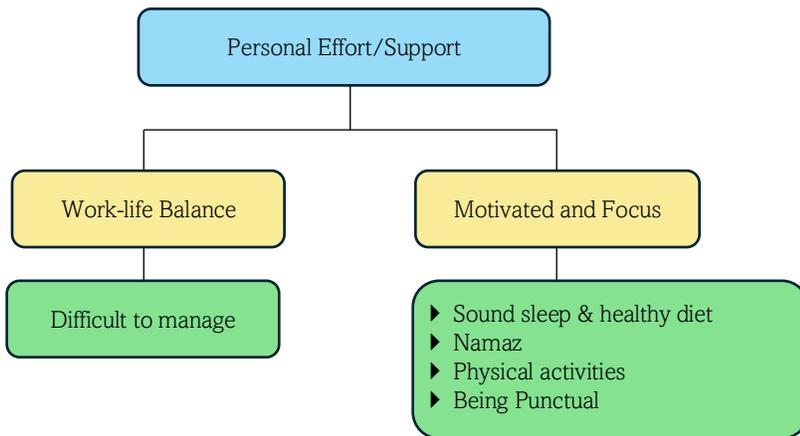
“Pray Namaz, and hard physical activities like gym, jogging.” (St-3)

“I focus on the lesson which reduces my stress.” (St-4)

“Try to do work in time.” (St-5)

Figure 9

Personal Efforts



Theme 4

Resilience Strategies

Q. 3. *How do you cope with stress?*

“I always try to be positive in stressful situations. I eat and drink healthy and give consolation to myself by reciting the Holy Quraan. But sometimes, in severe stress I take help from some relaxation pills for sleeping.” (St-1)

“I often play music or see movies to divert my mind.” (St-2)

“I usually tackle my stress with hard physical activities, it works for me most of the time.” (St-3)

“Hard work and use own transport.” (St-4)

“I cope with stress by seeking help from Allah Almighty and continuous effort.” (St-5)

Q. 11. Which food / diet you prefer which sooth from stress?

“Tea and lots of water and on the other hand, vegetables, eggs, milk and fruit can sooth us from stress.” (St-1)

“No food sooth me from stress, but eating Marconi give me pleasure.” (St-2)

“No, idea about it.” (St-3)

“Vegetables.” (St-4)

“Taking water and healthy diet can be helpful.” (St-5)

Q. 12. Mention Islamic strategy to get relief from stress, in your opinion.

“During stressful situations I use to recite the Holy Quraan and I try to find relief in longer prostrations.” (St-1)

“Punctuality in Namaz, recitation of Quran, and Zikr.” (St-2)

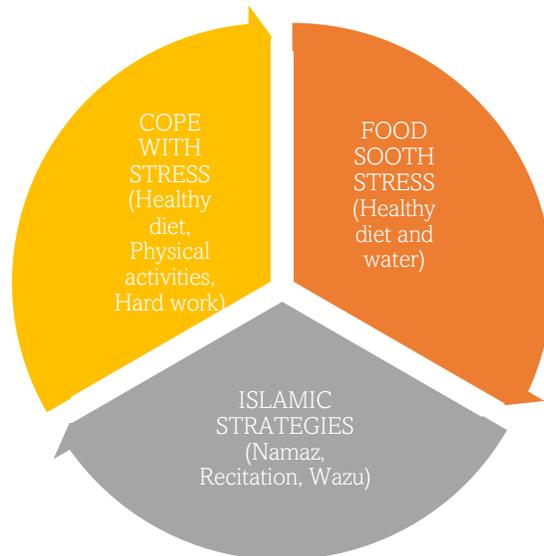
“Namaz and Quran recitation.” (St-3)

“Paying the rights of Allah and the rights of people.” (St-4)

“Wazu, Namaz and recitation of Holy Quran.” (St-5)

Figure 10

Resilience Strategies



Intervention

DASS -21 was run among M.Phil students of various departments of the University of Science and Technology, Bannu in which only 5 students having stress were selected for Islamic intervention.

Table 2

List of Stressed students (Before Intervention)

S. No.	Code	Level of Study	Level of Stress
1	St-1(AS)	M.Phil	Moderate
2	St-2(NG)	M.Phil	Moderate
3	St-3(SK)	M.Phil	Moderate
4	St-4(AM)	M.Phil	Moderate
5	St-5(MN)	M.Phil	Severe

Intervention

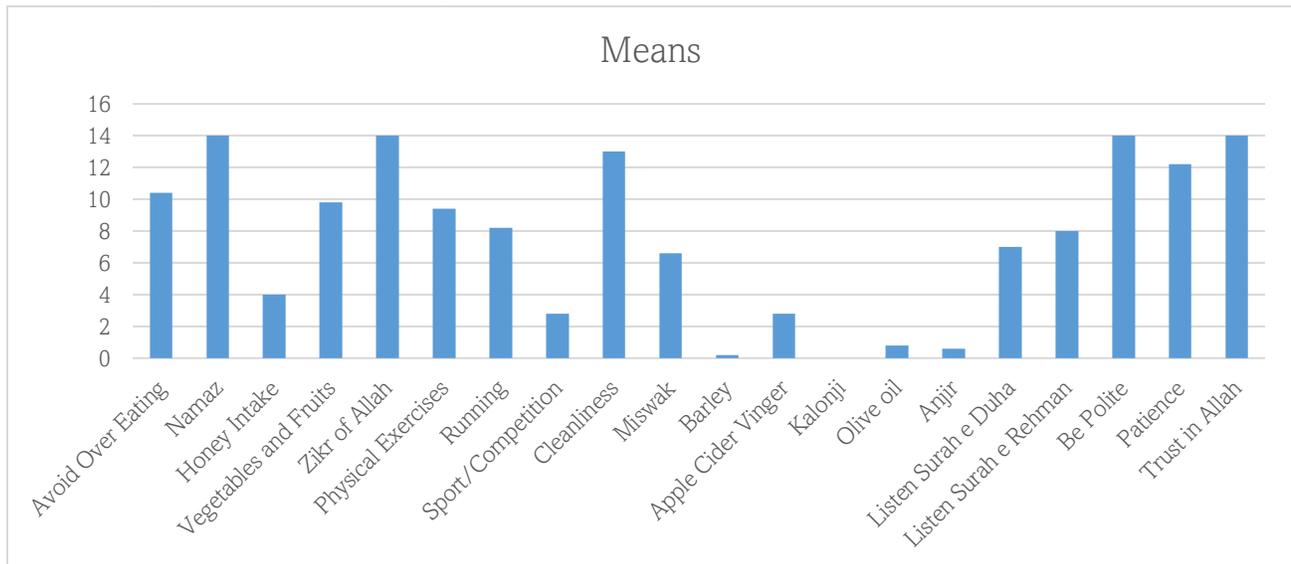
Table 3

Result of Intervention of stressed students

S.No.	Islamic Resilience Strategies	No. of Students					M
		1	2	3	4	5	
1.	Avoid Over eating	12	05	10	14	11	10.4
2.	Namaz	14	14	14	14	14	14
3.	Honey intake	0	0	0	14	06	4
4.	Vegetables and fruits	11	05	10	14	09	9.8
5.	Zikr of Allah	14	14	14	14	14	14
6.	Physical Exercises	11	0	14	14	08	9.4
a.	Running	11	0	12	14	04	8.2
b.	Sport / Competition	0	0	0	14	0	2.8
7.	Cleanliness	14	14	14	14	09	13
8.	Miswak	0	05	14	14	0	6.6
9.	Barely	0	0	0	0	01	0.2
10.	Apple Cider Vineger	0	0	0	14	0	2.8
11.	Kalonji	0	0	0	0	0	0
12.	Olive Oil	0	0	0	0	04	0.8
13.	Anjir	0	0	0	0	03	0.6
14.	Listen Surah e Duha	14	0	0	14	07	7
15.	Listen Surah e Rehman	14	01	0	14	11	8
16.	Be Polite	14	14	14	14	14	14
17.	Patience	14	14	14	14	05	12.2
18.	Trust in Allah	14	14	14	14	14	14

Graph 1

Intervention of Islamic Resilience Strategies



As shown in Graph 1, Namaz, Zikr of Allah, Cleanliness, being Polite, Patience and Trust in Allah were the common Islamic Resilience Strategies used by university students and the results of Posttest were also positive after using these strategies.

Table 4*List of Stressed students (After Intervention)*

S. No.	Code	Level of Study	Level of Stress
1	St-1(AS)	M.Phil	Normal
2	St-2(NG)	M.Phil	Normal
3	St-3(SK)	M.Phil	Normal
4	St-4(AM)	M.Phil	Normal
5	St-5(MN)	M.Phil	Mild

Islamic Resilience Strategies were useful to reduce stress levels among university students.

Aprilianti (2024) posited that Islamic psychological principles—specifically, trust in God, patience, and gratitude—significantly influence academic resilience.

In a study of Bano, et al. (2025) showed that practicing faith related activities: Salah and reading Holy Quran improves mental health of students.

Findings

- ▶ Most students were **moderately** stressed in their university climate

Theme # 1

Stress Experience

- ▶ At University, students feel stressed on doing assignments and presentations, or due to over-thinking, loss of memory, transport problem and lack of basic facilities for research.
- ▶ The biggest sources of stress are presentations and assignments, the slow approval process of research, time management & social pressure, and insufficient transport facilities.

Theme # 2

University Contribution

- ▶ No adequate resources to help students manage stress.
- ▶ Students neither sought help for stress-related concerns at the university nor was anyone helpful.
- ▶ The mental health and well-being of students is not the priority of the University.
- ▶ A positive change came in my thinking after being admitted to the University.
- ▶ University may support in stress management of students.

Theme # 3

Personal Efforts / Support

- ▶ It is difficult to manage a Work-Life balance.
- ▶ For being motivated and focused, students take sound sleep, healthy diet, say prayers, do physical activities and try to be punctual.

Theme # 4

Resilience Strategies

- ▶ To cope from stress, students focus on healthy diet, Physical activities and do hard work.
- ▶ A healthy diet and intake of water are soothing foods.
- ▶ Namaz, recitation of Holy Quran and Wazu are the usual Islamic resilience strategies by students.

- ▶ There was a checklist of 18 strategies in which mostly followed strategies were: Namaz, Zikr of Allah, Cleanliness, being Polite, Patience, and Trust in Allah. By following these Islamic strategies, students' stress levels became normal in the posttest.

Conclusions

- ▶ The Level of stress of most students was **moderate** in their university climate.

Views of Stressed Students

- ▶ Stress of students were due to assignments, presentations, transport problems, overthinking, and lack of basic facilities for research.
- ▶ The mental health and well-being of the students is not the priority of the University.
- ▶ Taking part in Physical activities, a healthy diet, and following Islamic resilience strategies can cure stress.
- ▶ In **Islamic resilience intervention**, the most used strategies were Namaz, Zikar of Allah, Cleanliness, Patience, and Trust in Allah which were helpful for stressed students to get Normal from Moderate level.

Recommendations

- ▶ A healthy environment and healthy food may be provided on the university campus.
- ▶ Workshops and Seminars may be conducted for mental well-being. Students either do not know about mental health issues or feel too shy to discuss or get help from anyone on stress levels.
- ▶ Time for self-care and self-meditation is essential in routine life. Time Management and being organized is also important for mental health and well-being.
- ▶ Islamic resilience strategies were successful as Islam is a complete religion and it helps solve problems and cure you of stress. The most effective and frequently used strategies were Namaz, Zikar of Allah, Cleanliness, Patience, and Trust in Allah.

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