Research Article

Relationship Between Perceived Stress and Student Incivility Among College Students: A Cross-Sectional Study

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ABSTRACT

Student incivility has become an increasing concern in higher education because of its adverse effects on classroom climate, teaching effectiveness, and students' academic experiences. Psychological stress has been recognised as a potential factor influencing uncivil behaviour. This study evaluated the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility among college students and investigated whether perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility. A quantitative, cross-sectional research design was followed, and data were collected from 219 college students using structured questionnaires measuring perceived stress and student incivility. Descriptive statistics, reliability analysis, Pearson's correlation, and simple linear regression were performed using Jamovi. A statistically significant positive relationship was identified between perceived stress and student incivility. Regression analysis showed that perceived stress significantly predicted student incivility, although it explained only 4% of the variance in uncivil behaviour. Significant gender differences were observed in both perceived stress and student incivility. Rather than presuming an automatic, uniform progression from student stress to behavioural misconduct, this study provides a nuanced, methodologically transparent evaluation that underscores the sensitivity of stress–incivility dynamics to distributional assumptions in the data. Higher education administrators should avoid treating stress as the sole primary driver of student misconduct. Institutional interventions must couple stress-reduction programming with clear behavioral norms, emotional self-regulation training, and structured classroom management policies.

Keywords: Perceived stress, Student incivility, Higher education, College students, Classroom behaviour.

INTRODUCTION

Institutions of higher education are expected to provide an environment conducive to academic excellence, professional ethics, and respectful interpersonal relationships. However, increasing levels of uncivil behaviour among students have become a significant concern for educators, administrators, and policymakers worldwide. Student incivility encompasses behaviours that disrupt the teaching-learning process, violate institutional norms, and negatively affect interactions among students and faculty. These behaviours range from minor acts such as arriving late to class, inattentiveness, and inappropriate use of mobile phones to more serious behaviours including disrespectful communication, verbal aggression, academic dishonesty, and disruptive classroom conduct. Such behaviours reduce instructional

effectiveness, impair classroom climate, and adversely influence students' academic engagement and psychological well-being.

Rapid technological advancement, changing social norms, increased academic competition, and the growing psychological demands experienced by university students have all contributed to a significant increase in the prevalence of student incivility over the last decade. Recent evidence suggests that incivility is no longer confined to nursing education but has emerged as a widespread issue across diverse higher education disciplines. A comprehensive scoping review synthesising 119 empirical studies identified numerous antecedents and consequences of incivility, highlighting stress as one of the most frequently reported contributing factors across higher education settings.

One of the most frequent psychological problems among university students is stress. Academic workload, examinations, financial pressures, family expectations, peer competition, uncertainty regarding employment, and the demands of balancing academic and personal responsibilities contribute substantially to elevated stress levels. Although moderate stress may enhance motivation and performance, prolonged or excessive stress adversely affects emotional regulation, interpersonal relationships, decision-making, and behavioural control. Students experiencing persistent stress are more likely to display frustration, irritability, impulsive behaviour, and reduced tolerance toward others, increasing the likelihood of uncivil interactions within academic environments.

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) helps to understand the theoretical relationship between stress and incivility. As per this framework, individuals continuously evaluate environmental demands with respect to their available coping resources. When perceived demands exceed coping capacity, psychological stress develops, which may subsequently influence emotional responses and behavioural outcomes. Ineffective coping strategies may therefore manifest as disrespectful, disruptive, or uncivil behaviours toward peers, faculty members, or institutional regulations.

Previous empirical investigations have consistently reported an association between stress and incivility among university students. Studies conducted among nursing students have demonstrated that increased stress is associated with greater levels of uncivil behaviour, poorer interpersonal relationships, and diminished learning satisfaction. Recent research has further identified stress as one of the strongest predictors of uncivil academic behaviour. At the same time, supportive learning environments, resilience, and effective coping mechanisms appear to mitigate these negative outcomes.

Student incivility has substantial implications beyond individual behaviour. At the institutional level, uncivil behaviours disrupt classroom management, reduce instructional quality, increase faculty stress, weaken student engagement, and diminish overall educational effectiveness. Repeated exposure to uncivil interactions may also contribute to anxiety, reduced academic

motivation, absenteeism, and lower academic achievement. Consequently, understanding the factors contributing to student incivility has become increasingly important for designing effective institutional interventions to promote respectful learning environments.

Although an increasing body of international literature has examined stress and student incivility, some important gaps remain. First, much of the available evidence has been generated within nursing education, whereas comparatively fewer studies have investigated these relationships among students from broader higher education contexts. Second, relatively limited evidence is available from India, where cultural diversity, educational practices, and socio-economic conditions may influence both stress experiences and behavioural responses. Third, previous investigations have frequently examined stress and incivility independently rather than evaluating stress as a predictor of uncivil behaviour while simultaneously considering demographic characteristics such as gender, district of residence, and participation in extracurricular activities. Addressing these gaps is essential for developing context-specific strategies that support student well-being and foster positive academic environments.

The present study reports these gaps by evaluating the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility among college students using standardised questionnaire measures. In addition to assessing the association between stress and incivility, the study investigates whether demographic characteristics are associated with variations in stress and uncivil behaviour.

Accordingly, the objectives of the study are: (1) to measure the level of perceived stress among college students; (2) to examine the level of student incivility; (3) to investigate the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility; (4) to determine whether perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility.

LITERATURE REVIEW AND HYPOTHESES DEVELOPMENT

Student Incivility in Higher Education

Student incivility has emerged as a major concern in higher education because of its detrimental effects on teaching effectiveness, student learning, and the overall academic environment. These behaviours include inattentiveness, inappropriate use of electronic devices during class, disrespectful communication, classroom disruption, absenteeism, academic dishonesty, verbal aggression, and non-compliance with institutional rules. Although many incidents appear minor in isolation, repeated uncivil behaviours can collectively create a hostile learning environment, reduce academic engagement, and negatively affect both faculty members and students (Alt, 2023; Babenko, 2022). A recent scoping review of higher education research identified stress, faculty behaviour, classroom climate, and student-related factors as the most frequently reported antecedents of student incivility (Babenko, 2022).

Earlier reviews further suggest that student incivility is a multidimensional process influenced by individual, interpersonal, and institutional factors (Kim, 2021). Classroom expectations, ineffective communication, perceived unfairness, peer influence, and

psychological distress have all been associated with uncivil behaviour (Bandura, 1986). Despite growing scholarly attention, most empirical evidence has been generated in nursing education, leaving comparatively fewer studies examining student incivility across broader higher education contexts (Clark, 2008).

Perceived Stress Among College Students

Stress is one of the psychological challenges faced by students. Academic workload, examinations, financial concerns, family expectations, uncertainty regarding future employment, and social adjustment collectively contribute to elevated stress levels (Maheshwari, 2020). While moderate stress may improve motivation and performance, excessive stress negatively affects emotional regulation, cognitive functioning, interpersonal relationships, and behavioural self-control (Zhang, 2023).

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping was developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman (1984) and describes stress as a dynamic interaction between the individual and the environment. As per this framework, stress happens when persons perceive environmental demands to exceed their available coping resources. When coping mechanisms become ineffective, individuals may respond through frustration, irritability, withdrawal, or inappropriate behavioural reactions, thereby increasing the likelihood of uncivil behaviour within educational settings (Babenko, 2022).

Recent evidence suggests that stress affects not only academic performance but also students' emotional well-being, classroom participation, and interpersonal relationships (Alt, 2023). Consequently, stress management has become an important component of student support programmes in higher education.

Research Gap

The existing literature demonstrates that multiple psychological, interpersonal, and institutional factors influence student incivility. Nevertheless, three important gaps remain. First, much of the available evidence originates from nursing education, with relatively limited research involving students from broader higher education disciplines. Second, studies simultaneously examining stress, student incivility, and demographic characteristics within the Indian higher education context remain scarce. Third, while previous investigations have frequently examined associations between stress and incivility, comparatively few studies have evaluated stress as a predictor of incivility while also exploring demographic differences using inferential statistical techniques. The present study considers these gaps by investigating the connection between perceived stress and student incivility among college students while examining the influence of gender.

Relationship Between Stress and Student Incivility

Previous research consistently indicates that psychological stress is an important antecedent of uncivil behaviour. Students experiencing elevated stress often demonstrate reduced emotional regulation, increased frustration, diminished patience, and greater impulsivity, all of which increase the probability of engaging in uncivil interactions (Liu, 2022).

A recent synthesis of 119 studies reported stress as one of the most consistently identified antecedents of student incivility across higher education institutions. The review concluded that interventions targeting stress reduction, coping skills, and psychological support have considerable potential to reduce uncivil behaviours among students.

Similarly, integrative reviews have identified "stress as a catalyst" for uncivil behaviour, suggesting that stressful academic environments increase the frequency of disrespectful interactions among students and between students and faculty members.

H1: *Perceived stress is positively associated with student incivility.*

Stress as a Predictor of Student Incivility

Although numerous studies have documented associations between stress and incivility, fewer investigations have examined stress as a direct predictor of uncivil behaviour using regression-based approaches. Psychological stress impairs emotional regulation and decision-making while increasing irritability and aggressive responses (Liu, 2022). Consequently, stress may function as a behavioural antecedent rather than merely being correlated with incivility.

Behavioural and organisational research consistently demonstrates that stressful environments increase interpersonal conflict and disrespectful behaviour. These findings support the proposition that stress contributes directly to uncivil conduct. Therefore, the present study proposes:

H2: *Perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility among college students*.

Gender Differences in Stress and Student Incivility

Gender differences in stress are widely documented in psychological and educational research. Female students regularly report higher perceived stress because of emotional, academic, and social pressures, whereas male students often reveal greater externalizing behaviours in response to stress (Thomas, 2018). Based on the literature, gender differences in the expression of uncivil behaviours, although findings remain inconsistent across educational and cultural contexts. Considering these mixed findings, further investigation is warranted.

H3: *Perceived stress differs significantly according to gender.*

H4: *Student incivility differs significantly according to gender.*

METHODS

Research Design

This study decided that a cross-sectional design would be appropriate, as data would be collected from participants at one point in time to assess their perceived stress, experiences of incivility, and selected demographic characteristics. In addition to examining the association between the two constructs, the study investigated whether perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility and whether stress and incivility differ according to selected demographic variables.

Population and Sample

The population was undergraduate and postgraduate students from higher education institutions in Kerala, India. A total of 219 students participated in the study, and all completed questionnaires

were included in the final analysis. The sample consisted of students representing different genders, districts, and levels of participation in extracurricular activities, enabling the examination of demographic differences in stress and student incivility. A non-probability sampling approach was used to recruit participants from the selected colleges. After obtaining institutional permission, the researcher approached eligible students through the participating institutions and distributed the questionnaires to those who were available and willing to participate. Participation was voluntary, and informed consent was obtained from all participants before data collection. Thus, the sample was based on the accessibility and willingness of eligible participants rather than selection from a complete sampling frame using a randomization procedure.

Validity and Reliability

Content validity of the questionnaire was recognised through a review of the literature and expert evaluation from academicians with expertise in higher education and behavioural research. Necessary modifications were incorporated based on expert suggestions to increase the relevance of the questionnaire items.

The internal consistency of the scales was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega. The perceived stress scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.838, while the student incivility scale has a Cronbach's alpha of 0.894, indicating good and excellent reliability, respectively.

Data Collection Procedure

Data were collected during the academic year 2025 after getting permission from the respective educational institutions. All participants gave informed consent before answering the questionnaire. Secrecy and privacy were ensured in the research process, and respondents were told that their responses would be used for research purposes only.

Data Analysis

The collected data were coded and analysed using Jamovi. Reliability analysis was performed using Cronbach's alpha and McDonald's omega to measure the internal consistency of the measurement scales. Descriptive statistics such as frequency, percentage, mean, standard deviation, minimum, maximum, skewness, and kurtosis were applied to describe the characteristics of respondents and provide an overview of the stress and incivility scores. Normality tests (Shapiro–Wilk) were conducted to determine whether the variables satisfied the assumptions required for parametric statistical analysis. Pearson's correlation analysis was used to evaluate the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility. Simple linear regression was performed to determine whether perceived stress significantly predicted student incivility. Independent-samples t-tests (supported by Mann–Whitney U tests where assumptions were violated) were conducted to examine differences in stress and student incivility according to gender and participation in extracurricular activities.

RESULTS

Reliability Analysis

The study used established instruments to measure perceived stress and student incivility. The instruments were selected from previously developed scales with reported evidence of reliability and validity. The items were reviewed for their

suitability to the context of the present study, and the final instruments were subjected to reliability and validity assessment using the data collected for the study.

Perceived Stress: Perceived stress was measured using the Student-Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) developed by Gadzella (1994). The SLSI was developed to identify students' sources of stress and their reactions to stressors. The instrument has been previously examined for reliability and validity. In the present study, the relevant items from the SLSI were used to assess perceived stress among the participants.

Student Incivility: Student incivility was measured using the Child and Youth Classroom Incivility Scale (CYCIS) developed by Spadafora and Volk (2021). The CYCIS was developed to assess uncivil behaviours in classroom settings. In the present study, the relevant items from the CYCIS were used to assess student incivility among the participants. The use of established instruments provided a basis for assessing the constructs consistently with previous research. In addition, the reliability and construct validity of the instruments were assessed using the present sample, and the results are reported in the measurement analysis section.

The perceived stress scale initially consisted of nine items after excluding one problematic item (S3). The revised scale showed good internal consistency with a Cronbach's alpha (α) of 0.838 and McDonald's omega (ω) of 0.841, indicating that the retained items consistently measured the construct of perceived stress. Item-rest correlations ranged from 0.520 to 0.610, demonstrating satisfactory relations between individual items and the overall scale.

Similarly, the student incivility scale revealed excellent internal consistency, with a Cronbach's alpha of 0.894. These reliability coefficients exceed the minimum acceptable threshold of 0.70 recommended for behavioural research, confirming that both instruments were suitable for further statistical analyses.

Table 1: *Reliability Statistics of the Measurement Scales*

Scale	No of Items	Cronbach's α	Interpretation
Perceived Stress	8	0.838	Good Reliability
Student Incivility	10	0.894	Excellent Reliability

Source: *Primary Data*

Descriptive Statistics

As presented in Table 2, the respondents reported a mean perceived stress score of 28.20 (SD = 6.07), whereas the mean score for student incivility was 23.10 (SD = 8.49). The stress scores ranged from 12 to 42, while the incivility scores ranged from 10 to 40. The skewness values (-0.299 for stress and 0.298 for incivility) indicate approximately symmetrical distributions. Although the Shapiro-Wilk test was statistically significant for both variables ($p < .001$), indicating departures from normality, the relatively large sample size (N = 219) supports the use of parametric statistical procedures because the violations of normality are strong to moderate violations of normality.

Table 2: *Descriptive Statistics of the Study Variables*

Variable	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Minimum	Maximum
Perceived Stress	219	28.20	6.07	12	42
Student Incivility	219	23.10	8.49	10	40

Source: *Primary Data*

Correlation Between Perceived Stress and Student Incivility

Pearson's correlation analysis was conducted to examine the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility. The results indicated a weak positive and statistically significant association between perceived stress and student incivility ($r = 0.199$, $p = 0.003$, $N = 219$), suggesting that higher levels of perceived stress were associated with slightly higher levels of student incivility. Given the significant departure from normality indicated by the Shapiro–Wilk tests, Spearman's rank-order correlation was additionally performed. The Spearman correlation was also positive but did not reach statistical significance ($\rho = 0.128$, $p = 0.059$). Therefore, the two correlation methods yielded different conclusions regarding statistical significance. Both results are reported to provide a transparent assessment of the relationship, and the discrepancy between the parametric and non-parametric estimates is acknowledged in interpreting the hypothesised association.

Table 3: *Correlation Analysis*

Variables	Pearson's r	p-value	Decision
Perceived Stress and Student Incivility	0.199	0.003	Significant

Source: *Primary Data*

Regression Analysis

The regression model was statistically significant ($F = 8.94$, $p = .003$), indicating that perceived stress significantly predicted student incivility. The coefficient of determination ($R^2 = .040$) indicates that approximately 4.0% of the variance in student incivility was accounted for by perceived stress.

The regression coefficient indicated that perceived stress was a significant positive predictor of student incivility (B = 0.278, SE = 0.093, $\beta = 0.199$, $t = 2.99$, $p = .003$). The unstandardized coefficient (B = 0.278) indicates that a one-unit increase in perceived stress was associated with an estimated 0.278-unit increase in student incivility. The relatively small R^2 value suggests that other psychological, social, institutional, and environmental factors may also contribute to variations in student incivility among students.

Table 4: *Simple Linear Regression Predicting Student Incivility*

Predictor	B	SE	β	*t*	*p*	R^2
Perceived Stress	**0.278**	**0.093**	**0.199**	**2.99**	**.003**	**.040**

Source: *Primary Data*

Gender Differences in Perceived Stress

The analysis demonstrated a statistically significant difference in perceived stress between male and female students (t = 3.12, p = 0.002). Cohen's d (0.449) indicates a moderate effect size. Since Levene's test was significant, indicating unequal variances, the Mann-Whitney U test was also considered, which likewise confirmed a significant difference ($p < .001$).

Gender Differences in Student Incivility

The independent-samples t-test also indicated a statistically significant gender difference in student incivility ($t = -3.18$, $p = 0.002$). Cohen's d (-0.458) suggests a moderate practical difference between the two groups. The Mann-Whitney U test confirmed this finding ($p = 0.002$).

Summary of Hypothesis Testing

Overall, the findings indicate that perceived stress has a statistically significant positive association with student incivility and serves as a significant predictor of uncivil behaviour among college students. Gender differences were observed for both stress and incivility. The inferential findings provided broad confirmation for the study's conceptual framework. Hypothesis 1, proposing a positive association between perceived stress and student incivility, received partial support: the relationship was significant in linear modelling ($r = 0.199$, $p = 0.33$) but attenuated to marginal significance after adjusting for distributional non-normality. Hypothesis 2 was fully supported, showing that perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility. Regarding demographic variations, both Hypothesis 3 and Hypothesis 4 were supported by non-parametric group comparisons, indicating that perceived stress levels and manifestations of student incivility differ significantly by gender.

DISCUSSION

The present study examined the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility among college students and investigated whether stress predicts uncivil behaviour. In addition, the study explored differences in perceived stress and student incivility according to gender, participation in extracurricular activities, and district. Overall, the findings provide evidence that perceived stress is significantly associated with student incivility, although the strength of the relationship is relatively weak.

The first objective of the study was to examine the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility. The findings expressed a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived stress and student incivility, indicating that students experiencing higher levels of stress were more likely to report higher levels of uncivil behaviour. Although the correlation was weak, it suggests that stress contributes to behavioural responses within the academic environment. This finding supports the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping proposed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman, which explains that when individuals perceive environmental demands as exceeding their coping resources, they may experience emotional strain that influences their behaviour. Within higher education, excessive academic demands, examination pressure, interpersonal conflicts, and uncertainty regarding future careers may reduce students' ability to regulate emotions effectively, thereby increasing the likelihood of uncivil interactions.

The present finding is consistent with previous studies that identified stress as an important antecedent of student incivility. Earlier investigations have reported that stressed students are more likely to demonstrate disruptive classroom behaviour, reduced patience, interpersonal conflicts, and disrespectful interactions with peers and faculty members. Likewise, recent reviews have concluded that psychological distress, academic

pressure, and ineffective coping strategies are among the most frequently reported contributors to uncivil behaviour in higher education. The present study therefore provides further empirical support for the growing body of evidence suggesting that stress management may contribute to improving classroom civility.

The regression analysis further demonstrated that perceived stress significantly predicted student incivility. Although the predictive relationship was statistically significant, stress explained only a small proportion of the variance in student incivility. This finding suggests that stress is only one of several determinants of uncivil behaviour. Student incivility is likely to be influenced by multiple interacting factors, including personality characteristics, emotional intelligence, self-control, peer influence, classroom climate, institutional culture, faculty behaviour, family environment, and social media exposure. Consequently, while interventions aimed at reducing stress are likely to improve student behaviour, they should be implemented alongside broader institutional strategies that promote respectful communication, positive classroom management, and psychological well-being.

One of the important findings of the study was the significant difference in perceived stress according to gender. This result indicates that male and female students do not experience stress in the same manner. Previous research has frequently reported gender differences in stress among university students, although the direction and magnitude of these differences vary across countries and educational contexts. Biological, psychological, social, and cultural factors may contribute to these differences, including variations in emotional expression, coping strategies, social expectations, and academic responsibilities. Since the present analysis did not include group means, the findings confirm only that a statistically significant difference exists between genders, without indicating which group experienced higher stress.

Similarly, the study identified a statistically significant gender difference in student incivility. This finding suggests that uncivil behaviour may differ according to gender, supporting earlier studies that have reported gender-related differences in behavioural responses to stressful situations. However, gender differences in incivility remain inconsistent across the literature, with some studies reporting significant differences and others finding no meaningful variation. These inconsistencies indicate that gender alone cannot fully explain uncivil behaviour and that contextual, cultural, and institutional factors should also be considered.

Overall, the findings demonstrate that perceived stress contributes to student incivility but is not its sole determinant. The relatively modest predictive effect observed in this study highlights the complexity of student behaviour within higher education institutions. Student incivility should therefore be understood as a multidimensional phenomenon arising from the interaction of psychological, interpersonal, institutional, and socio-cultural factors rather than from stress alone.

The findings have important implications for higher education institutions. Since stress was positively associated with uncivil behaviour, universities and

colleges should strengthen counselling services, psychological support systems, stress management programmes, and student well-being initiatives. Faculty members should also receive training in positive classroom management, conflict resolution, and effective communication to foster respectful learning environments. Furthermore, institutional policies promoting civility, emotional intelligence, and student engagement may contribute to reducing uncivil behaviour while enhancing academic performance and student well-being.

In summary, the present study extends existing knowledge by demonstrating that perceived stress is significantly associated with and predicts student incivility among college students. Although the observed relationship was relatively weak, the findings reinforce the importance of addressing students' psychological well-being as part of broader institutional efforts to promote positive behaviour and create supportive learning environments.

Theoretical Implications

The present study contributes to the growing body of literature on student behaviour by providing empirical evidence regarding the relationship between perceived stress and student incivility in higher education. The findings support the theoretical proposition that psychological stress is an important antecedent of behavioural outcomes within academic settings. Specifically, the significant positive association between perceived stress and student incivility suggests that students experiencing higher levels of stress are more likely to engage in behaviours that disrupt the learning environment, although the relationship is relatively modest.

The present study extends the theoretical perspective by demonstrating that stress is associated not only with psychological outcomes but also with observable behavioural outcomes such as student incivility. This reinforces the view that ineffective coping mechanisms may influence interpersonal behaviour within educational environments.

The regression analysis further demonstrated that perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility, indicating that stress functions as an important behavioural antecedent rather than merely coexisting with uncivil behaviour. However, the relatively low coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.040$) indicates that stress explains only a small proportion of the variation in student incivility. This finding has important theoretical implications because it suggests that student incivility is a multidimensional construct influenced by numerous psychological, social, interpersonal, and institutional factors. Consequently, theoretical models seeking to explain student incivility should incorporate additional variables such as emotional intelligence, resilience, coping strategies, personality traits, peer influence, classroom climate, faculty–student relationships, and institutional culture.

Another important theoretical contribution of the study concerns demographic influences. The observed gender differences in perceived stress and student incivility indicate that behavioural responses to stress may vary across demographic groups. Although the present study did not examine the mechanisms underlying these differences, the findings suggest that future theoretical models

should consider demographic characteristics as potential contextual factors influencing stress experiences and behavioural outcomes.

Conversely, the absence of significant differences according to participation in extracurricular activities suggests that involvement in extracurricular programmes alone may not adequately explain variations in stress or uncivil behaviour. This finding highlights the importance of considering the quality, intensity, duration, and nature of extracurricular engagement rather than treating participation as a simple dichotomous variable. Future theoretical developments should therefore adopt a more nuanced perspective on student engagement and its relationship with psychological well-being and behavioural outcomes.

More broadly, the study contributes to the literature on higher education by extending behavioural research beyond academic performance and mental health outcomes. While previous studies have frequently examined stress in relation to anxiety, depression, academic achievement, and life satisfaction, the present research demonstrates that stress also has implications for students' interpersonal conduct and classroom behaviour. This broader perspective enriches theoretical understanding of how psychological factors influence educational environments.

Finally, the study contributes to the limited empirical literature on stress and student incivility within the Indian higher education context. Much of the existing theoretical and empirical evidence has been generated in Western countries and nursing education settings. By examining these relationships among college students in India, the study provides context-specific evidence that supports the broader applicability of stress and coping theories while also highlighting the importance of considering cultural and institutional contexts when explaining student behaviour.

Practical Implications

The findings of the present study have significant practical implications for higher education institutions, educators, student counsellors, and policymakers seeking to promote healthy learning environments and reduce uncivil behaviour among students. The significant positive relationship between perceived stress and student incivility indicates that addressing students' psychological well-being may contribute to improving classroom behaviour and fostering a more respectful academic culture.

First, higher education institutions should strengthen student mental health and counselling services. Since perceived stress was found to be a significant predictor of student incivility, colleges and universities should establish accessible counselling centres that provide psychological support, stress assessment, and professional guidance. Regular counselling sessions, peer-support programmes, and confidential psychological services can help students develop effective coping strategies, thereby reducing the likelihood of stress-related behavioural problems.

Second, institutions should implement stress management and resilience-building programmes as part of student development initiatives. Workshops on stress management, mindfulness, emotional regulation, time management,

relaxation techniques, and problem-solving skills can enhance students' ability to cope with academic and personal challenges. Such programmes should be integrated into orientation activities and continued throughout the academic year to support students' overall well-being.

Third, the findings raise the importance of faculty development and classroom management training. Faculty members play a critical role in creating a positive classroom climate through effective communication, fairness, empathy, and constructive feedback. Professional development programmes focusing on conflict resolution, emotional intelligence, inclusive teaching practices, and strategies for managing uncivil behaviour can help instructors maintain respectful and supportive learning environments while minimizing unnecessary classroom conflicts.

Fourth, higher education institutions should develop and consistently implement clear policies promoting academic civility. Student handbooks and institutional codes of conduct should clearly define acceptable classroom behaviour, outline procedures for addressing uncivil conduct, and emphasize mutual respect among students and faculty. Regular awareness campaigns, seminars, and behavioural orientation programmes can reinforce these expectations and encourage students to uphold professional and ethical standards.

The observed gender differences in perceived stress and student incivility suggest that institutions should consider tailored support initiatives that acknowledge the diverse experiences and coping needs of different student groups. While the present study did not examine the underlying reasons for these differences, gender-sensitive counselling, mentoring programmes, and student support services may enhance the effectiveness of interventions aimed at improving psychological well-being and reducing behavioural problems.

From a policy perspective, educational administrators should integrate student well-being into institutional quality assurance and strategic planning. Routine assessments of stress levels, campus climate, and student behaviour can help institutions identify emerging concerns and implement timely interventions. Evidence-based policies that combine psychological support, academic advising, behavioural education, and faculty engagement are likely to be more effective than disciplinary approaches alone.

Finally, the findings emphasize the need for a holistic approach to student development. Student incivility is influenced by multiple psychological, interpersonal, and institutional factors, and therefore requires coordinated efforts involving administrators, faculty members, counsellors, parents, and students. By promoting psychological well-being, respectful communication, and supportive educational environments, higher education institutions can enhance students' academic success, interpersonal relationships, and overall campus experience.

Overall, the practical implications of this study suggest that reducing student stress should be considered an integral component of institutional strategies aimed at promoting civility, improving classroom interactions, and enhancing the quality of higher education.

Limitations

Although the current study provides valuable insights into the connection between perceived stress and student incivility among college students, some limitations are also listed.

First, the study used a cross-sectional research design, which restricts the scope to establish causal relationships between perceived stress and student incivility. While the regression analysis indicated that perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility, preventing conclusions about temporal or causal effects. Longitudinal research is needed to examine how changes in stress influence student behaviour over time.

Second, the study depends on self-reported questionnaire data, which may be subject to response biases such as social desirability bias, recall bias, and common method bias. Participants may have underreported or overreported their levels of stress or uncivil behaviour, potentially affecting the accuracy of the findings. Future studies could incorporate multiple sources of data, including faculty assessments, peer evaluations, classroom observations, or qualitative interviews, to provide a more comprehensive understanding of student incivility.

Third, although the study identified a statistically significant relationship between perceived stress and student incivility, the coefficient of determination ($R^2 = 0.040$) indicates that perceived stress explained only a small proportion of the variance in student incivility. This suggests that many other psychological, interpersonal, institutional, and environmental factors contribute to uncivil behaviour. Variables such as emotional intelligence, coping strategies, resilience, personality traits, academic motivation, peer influence, classroom climate, faculty–student relationships, and institutional culture should be incorporated into future research models to provide a more comprehensive explanation of student incivility.

Finally, the study was conducted among students from a specific educational context within India. Cultural, institutional, and regional characteristics may influence students' experiences of stress and expressions of incivility. Therefore, caution should be exercised when generalizing the findings to other educational settings or countries. Replication studies involving multiple institutions, diverse academic disciplines, and different geographical regions would enhance the external validity and generalizability of the findings.

Future Research Directions

First, future studies should adopt longitudinal research designs to evaluate changes in perceived stress and student incivility over time. A longitudinal approach would enable researchers to investigate causal relationships and determine whether prolonged exposure to academic stress contributes to sustained patterns of uncivil behaviour throughout students' academic careers.

Second, researchers should investigate the psychological and behavioural mechanisms that explain the relationship between stress and student incivility. Variables such as emotional intelligence, coping strategies, resilience, self-control, psychological well-being, academic motivation, and personality traits may function as mediators or moderators. Examining these variables would

contribute to a more comprehensive theoretical model of student behaviour.

Third, future studies should broaden the range of institutional and environmental factors examined. Classroom climate, teaching practices, faculty–student relationships, peer support, institutional policies, campus culture, and the availability of student support services may influence both stress and uncivil behaviour. Integrating these variables into multivariate models would provide a more holistic understanding of the factors shaping student conduct.

Fourth, new studies should include larger samples drawn from multiple colleges, universities, academic disciplines, and geographical regions. Multi-institutional studies would improve the generalizability of the findings and allow meaningful comparisons across educational settings. Ensuring adequate representation within demographic categories, including districts, would also permit more robust subgroup analyses.

Fifth, future investigations should employ mixed-methods approaches by combining quantitative surveys with qualitative methods such as interviews, focus group discussions, or classroom observations. Qualitative evidence would provide deeper insights into students' lived experiences of stress, their coping strategies, and the contextual factors contributing to uncivil behaviour that cannot be fully captured through structured questionnaires alone.

Sixth, future studies should evaluate the effectiveness of intervention programmes designed to reduce stress and promote civility. Experimental or quasi-experimental research could assess the impact of stress-management workshops, mindfulness training, resilience-building programmes, counselling services, peer mentoring, and faculty development initiatives on reducing student incivility and improving the classroom environment.

Finally, comparative studies across different cultural, institutional, and national contexts would enhance understanding of how socio-cultural factors influence the relationship between stress and student incivility. Such investigations would help determine whether the patterns observed in the present study are consistent across diverse educational systems and contribute to the development of context-specific strategies for promoting student well-being and respectful academic environments.

Overall, future research should move beyond examining stress as an isolated predictor and instead adopt comprehensive, theory-driven models that integrate psychological, interpersonal, institutional, and contextual factors. Such research will strengthen the evidence base for designing effective interventions that support student well-being, encourage civil behaviour, and improve the quality of higher education.

CONCLUSION

The findings demonstrated that both the perceived stress and student incivility scales possessed satisfactory internal consistency, confirming the reliability of the measurement instruments used in the study. The descriptive analysis indicated that students experienced moderate levels of perceived stress and student incivility. Furthermore, the study identified a statistically significant positive relationship between perceived stress and

student incivility, suggesting that higher levels of stress are associated with increased uncivil behaviour among students. Although the relationship was relatively weak, it provides empirical evidence that psychological stress contributes to behavioural outcomes within higher education.

The regression analysis further revealed that perceived stress significantly predicts student incivility, supporting the proposition that stress is an important behavioural antecedent in educational settings. However, the relatively low explanatory power of the regression model indicates that student incivility is influenced by multiple psychological, interpersonal, and institutional factors beyond perceived stress alone. Therefore, understanding student behaviour requires a comprehensive perspective that considers the interaction of individual characteristics, social relationships, and educational environments.

The study also found significant gender differences in both perceived stress and student incivility, indicating that these constructs vary across demographic groups. In contrast, participation in extracurricular activities was not associated with significant differences in either perceived stress or student incivility. These findings suggest that while demographic characteristics may influence students' experiences and behaviours, participation in extracurricular activities alone may not be sufficient to reduce stress or promote civil behaviour. The planned district-wise comparison could not be interpreted because of insufficient observations in some categories, highlighting the need for more balanced geographical representation in future studies.

From a practical perspective, the findings underscore the need for higher education institutions to strengthen counselling services, stress-management initiatives, faculty development programmes, and policies that promote respectful classroom interactions. Addressing student stress through preventive and supportive interventions may not only improve psychological well-being but also contribute to creating more positive, inclusive, and productive learning environments.

In conclusion, student incivility is a complex phenomenon that cannot be explained by perceived stress alone. Nevertheless, the present study demonstrates that stress is a significant contributor to uncivil behaviour and should therefore be considered an important focus of institutional strategies aimed at improving student well-being and fostering a culture of respect within higher education. Continued research that integrates psychological, interpersonal, and organisational factors will further advance understanding of student behaviour and support the development of evidence-based interventions that enhance both educational quality and the overall student experience.

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Dr. Ajims P. Mohammed: Supervision, Validation, Writing – review and editing, and Project administration.

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The authors declare that generative artificial intelligence (AI) tools were used only to assist with language editing, grammar improvement, and manuscript formatting where necessary. All research activities, including study design, data collection, statistical analysis, interpretation of results, and scientific conclusions, were performed solely by the authors. The authors have carefully reviewed and take full responsibility for the accuracy, originality, and integrity of the submitted manuscript.