

La percepción del estrés académico en estudiantes universitarios y su forma de afrontarlo

University student's perceptions of academic stress and ways to dealing with it

A percepção do estresse acadêmico em estudantes universitários e sua forma de enfrentá-lo

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Resumen

La sociedad exige a las personas logros y comportamientos propios de un grupo social, cuando una persona no puede responder a esas exigencias, genera estrés y modifica su comportamiento. El objetivo de esta investigación es identificar la percepción de estrés entre los estudiantes de la Facultad de Ciencias Económicas-Administrativas de la Universidad Autónoma del Carmen, en Campeche, México. La muestra consideró 387 jóvenes. El Alfa de Cronbach fue de 0.85. Se empleó una descripción simple, una regresión lineal para relacionar factores y un comparativo entre mujeres y hombres. Las mujeres reconocen un nivel más alto de estrés que los hombres; este comportamiento se revierte en la Licenciatura en negocios internacionales, donde los hombres mostraron un

nivel cinco de estrés mientras que las mujeres un nivel cuatro. Los jóvenes bajo estrés aumentan el consumo de cafeína y cigarro, y en algunos varones se identificó el uso de sustancias como la marihuana como un medio para hacer frente al estrés. Se han implementado pláticas para evitar el uso de sustancias nocivas y presentar opciones como deportes y ayuda psicológica a los jóvenes.

Palabras clave: adicciones, desarrollo, factores estresantes, masculinidad, resiliencia.

Abstract

Society demands from people achievements and behaviors typical of a social group, when a person cannot respond to these demands, it generates stress and modifies their behavior. The purpose of this study was to identify the perception of stress among students of the Faculty of Economics and Administrative Sciences of the Universidad Autonoma del Carmen, in Campeche, Mexico. The sample included 387 young people. Cronbach's alpha was 0.85. A simple description, a linear regression to relate factors and a comparison between women and men were used. Women recognized a higher level of stress than men; this behavior is reversed in the international bussiness degreee program, where men showed a higher level of stress (five) than women (four). Stressed students increase the consumption of caffeine and cigarettes, and some men recognized the use of marijuana as a means to cope with stress. Talks with students are needed to avoid the consumption of harmful substances and to offer options such as sports and psychological assistance.

Keywords: addictions, development, stressors, masculinity, resilience.

Resumo

A sociedade exige das pessoas conquistas e comportamentos típicos de um grupo social, quando uma pessoa não consegue responder a essas demandas gera estresse e modifica seu comportamento. O objetivo desta pesquisa é identificar a percepção de estresse entre estudantes da Faculdade de Ciências Econômico-Administrativas da Universidade Autônoma de Carmen, em Campeche, México. A amostra incluiu 387 jovens. O alfa de Cronbach foi de 0,85. Foi utilizada uma descrição simples, uma regressão linear para relacionar os fatores e uma comparação entre mulheres e homens. As mulheres reconhecem um nível de stress mais elevado do que os homens; Esse comportamento se inverte no Bacharelado em Negócios Internacionais, onde os homens apresentaram nível cinco de estresse enquanto as mulheres apresentaram nível quatro. Os jovens sob estresse

umentam o consumo de cafeína e cigarros e, em alguns homens, o uso de substâncias como a maconha foi identificado como forma de lidar com o estresse. Foram implementadas palestras para evitar o uso de substâncias nocivas e apresentar opções como esportes e ajuda psicológica aos jovens.

Palavras-chave: vícios, desenvolvimento, estressores, masculinidade, resiliência.

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Introduction

People learn to develop in a society that demands achievements, obedience, and behaviors typical of a social group. When the person cannot respond to these group demands, they choose to generate stress and modify their behavior. Young people are in a transitional stage of independence, in which they learn to take responsibility and freedoms; however, this transition involves moments of stress for individuals. For men, who are a little-studied group, it is related to clinical and social problems, such as aggression, violence, and addictions (Martínez *et al.*, 2024).

Stress has been linked to the evolution of humanity and life, so it is not a phenomenon of modern generations or a specific social group. The simple fact of adapting to a new experience generates stress in the individual and the constant transformation of the world forces man to face new situations where adaptation acts as a survival factor. For Miñan *et al.*, (2023) stress today is closely linked to social media and technology, but it is a result of life itself.

The importance of studying the topic of stress is based on the effects it causes in the population, especially due to the result it generates in the young population, and according to Ramón *et al.*, (2019, p. 1339) Stress, anxiety and depression are related to attitudes such as unhealthy eating, which are the result of psychological disorders that people suffer. Some eating disorders such as anorexia and/or bulimia are the result of stressful moments and people relate eating to pressures from society, which generates stress and changes in people's behavior. It can be said that stress affects all types of people and various studies mentioned throughout the article show an increasing incidence of stress in university students. For this reason, the study is important so that university institutions can take measures to prevent or mitigate the effects of academic stress.

A student not only faces academic stress, but also faces the fact that society generates differential treatment that determines a clear distinction between thoughts, behaviors, beliefs, and attitudes through which femininity and masculinity are constructed, developing characteristics, traits, and attributes (Segura and Pérez, 2016, p. 110). According to Olvera and Ángeles, men consider that they must be self-sufficient,



strong, with rigid and aggressive roles, in addition to having characteristics of dominant masculinity such as emotional toughness, authority, and leadership (2022, p. 21). Therefore, for a man to show that he is stressed and that he is affected by a situation, it is sometimes poorly demonstrated or accepted by the person.

In the case of masculinity as gender relations, those who hold an assumption of superiority are generally men, who give mandates to women or other men, and it is possible that women also give men the mandate to assume a particular role or practice of masculinity (Ramírez, 2020, p. 15). Masculinity is linked to the gender approach, the treatment of boys and girls is different, men are required to have more discipline and toughness so that they do not express their feelings; otherwise, expressions considered unmasculine are highlighted (Pizarro, 2006, p. 13). In this way, it is considered that a man must deny certain emotions such as fear, love and sadness, which can generate stress (Morales, 2022, p. 28).

Other authors such as Zumba and Moreta (2022, p. 117) highlight that stress and somatization are more prevalent in women than in men. Long (2021, p. 8) indicates that women use the emotion-focused coping style and also have a greater development of emotional intelligence to deal with problems that cause stress.

Defining stress

Stress is a typical syndrome that appears in individuals regardless of the nature or origin of the element and is a response to damage or an external agent (Selye, 1936). This condition has two components: the stressful situation (physical, psychological, emotional, cognitive stimulus) which translates as the internal response of a person to an external situation and which requires readjusting or adapting to the environment and the second element is the stress reaction, that is, the effect or response of the organism to the demands of a new situation, which generates stimuli to search for quick solutions to such situations (López *et al.*, 2014, p. 375) .

Stress is known as a process in which an event or stimulus is perceived as threatening and that generates physiological, emotional and behavioral responses, which can be considered normal (Lemos *et al.*, 2018, p.2). Other elements that generate stress can be environmental or due to an organizational area of the company, this psychosocial risk can be caused due to different work situations, in what is considered to be one of the possible triggers of physical and mental afflictions (Sinisterra, 2021, p. 14). Currently, the use of information and communication technologies generates behaviors and emotions in young people due to their use, giving rise to technostress (Asensio-Martínez *et al.* , 2024).

According to information from the Mexican Social Security Institute (IMSS), stress is potentially contagious, since being close to a person in a stressful situation raises cortisol levels in the observer (IMSS, 2022). When a person cannot control stress, it can reach a severe level, indicating the existence of negative consequences for life (De la Rosa *et al.*, 2022. p. 63). In some cases, they manifest anxiety, anguish, despair and sleep disorder (García-Hernández *et al.*, 2024).

Factors that generate academic stress

In the student environment, homework and its length are the main factors that can contribute to generating stress in the student. The university context causes stress, which is a response to the multiple demands that young people have (Gambini *et al.*, 2024). The study by Barraza and Barraza (2019) indicates a relationship between the overload of homework and school activities, the limited time to do homework, and stress in students. School tasks do not generate stress, but rather the amount and lack of organization of time to do them. In addition, as indicated by Arpi *et al.* (2024), students being subjected to stressful situations impacts their healthy behaviors.

According to the study carried out by Zárata-Depraect *et al.* (2018, p. 153), the absence of a study habit generates a greater predisposition to stress on the part of young people who do not show a positive habit to face academic demands, due to this, when there is an overload of work that is not correctly distributed in schedules, they generate a stressful situation.

Another variable related to tasks is the study program. Silva-Ramos, *et al.* (2020, p. 80) relate the demands of the educational program with the level of stress presented by students. It is understandable that people must understand topics with different levels of complexity, therefore, it is expected that, among the different educational programs of a university, students show different levels of stress.

Stressors such as time to do homework, lack of clarity from teachers and even the teacher's personality generate stress, in addition to the exams and evaluations carried out by teachers are part of the stressors that can affect the health of students, this factor is related to the demands of the career and the difficulty of the exams that students must take (Alfonso *et al.*, 2015; Martínez *et al.*, 2023). The anxiety that precedes an exam is related to the student's attitude, the The most anxious are those who present styles of self-blame and self-focused rumination and the least anxious are those who present approach and accommodation; a more adaptive coping style favors preparation and study and, therefore, taking exams without generating stress (Piemontesi *et al.*, 2012).

Students face elements that are typical of university life; however, family life can generate stressors, elements such as economic problems, health problems, relationships with partners or family members that cause a demand for energy and concentration. For Frutos and Tello (2020), unemployment, depression and economic problems generate stress in young people.

The purpose of the study is derived from research already carried out by other authors in the city, due to the fact that an increase in alcohol and tobacco consumption has been observed, in addition to an increase in suicides in the population between 15 and 25 years of age (Reporteros en línea, 2020). Research carried out by Telumbre *et al.* (2017); Frutos and Tello (2020) in the city highlights the high number of stressors in young people and their relationship with the consumption of harmful substances or attitudes derived from stress. For this reason, it is necessary to know the possible elements that are considered key points of stress in young students in Ciudad del Carmen, Campeche, Mexico.

The consequences of academic stress are perceived from changes in emotional state, physical health and even interpersonal relationships. This type of stress affects various careers in the university area. The work analyzed the level of academic stress perceived in students of the five degrees of the Faculty of Economic-Administrative Sciences (FCEA) of the Autonomous University of Carmen (UNACAR), considering the factors that influence this phenomenon to occur in them, such as the tasks of the university, personal relationships with classmates, the attitude of the professor, demands of projects and tasks with a time limit, the performance of community service or professional internships, in addition to identifying the way in which students deal with stressful situations.

Methodology

This article conducts a descriptive analysis of the perception of stress in young people studying one of the five bachelor's degrees offered by the Faculty of Economic-Administrative Sciences of the Autonomous University of Carmen, in the state of Campeche, Mexico. For the study, the objective of the study was explained to the young people individually, and they were also told that exact data such as registration or name would not be requested, only the interviewee number. They were also free to not answer some questions if they wished not to do so. A questionnaire was applied in which the students were asked to identify the elements that trigger stress in their academic life and the degree to which it affects them, considering a scale of 1 to 5. Likewise, the study

compared the level of stress that young people present depending on the degree they study (accounting, business administration, tourism administration, marketing or international business), in order to offer each of the degrees or in general talks or workshops for stress management.

This study was cross-sectional with a quantitative and qualitative approach and a non-experimental design. To obtain the sample, a total population of 1,074 students from the Faculty of Economic-Administrative Sciences of the Autonomous University of Carmen in the Municipality of Carmen, Campeche, Mexico was considered.

The sample was obtained using the formula for a finite population:

$$n = \frac{Z^2pqN}{(N-1)e^2 + Z^2pq}$$

Where: N= 1,074 (total number of students at the Faculty)

Z= 1.96 (confidence level)

p= 0.5 (probability in favor)

q= 0.5 (probability against)

e= 5% (estimation error)

Applying the above formula considering an estimation error of five percent, a sample of 342 students is estimated.

The information was obtained from a simple random sample, where students from the entire faculty, regardless of the semester, could be surveyed because the groups are mixed from all majors and the young people (with the exception of the first semester) generate their own schedules, which makes the groups diverse.

A total of 387 questionnaires were applied at the faculty, distributed as follows:

Table 1. Sample distribution of the Faculty of Economic-Administrative Sciences

Degree	Population	Sample
International Business	260	110
Business Administration	293	83
Tourism management	133	40
Accountancy	285	78
Marketing	103	76
Total	1 074	387

Source: own elaboration

Instrument

For young people, a questionnaire divided into three sections was applied:

Section one. General aspects such as age, sex, marital status, and dependents.

Section two. Academic data such as semester, subjects taken, hours spent in classes, hours spent on academic work.

Section three. Self-perceived level of stress, manias developed under stress. Consumption of tobacco, alcohol, caffeine or food or other substances during periods of stress.

For sections one and two, the responses are open for each participant, while for section three, a scale of one to five was considered where one is a low level of stress, while the value of five represents the highest level of stress.

The database allowed for the generation of a descriptive statistical analysis and a multiple linear regression in order to relate the level of stress with factors such as the semester, the number of subjects taken during the semester, sex, age of the student, dependents and employment status. For the selection of the multiple model, a confidence level of 95% and an $\alpha = 0.05$ were considered. The analysis involved the use of Excel as a basic tool for simple statistical analysis and graphing the behaviors of the study group. A Cronbach's Alpha was obtained for the instrument. of 0.85, which is considered that the data collected in the stress measurement are reliable.

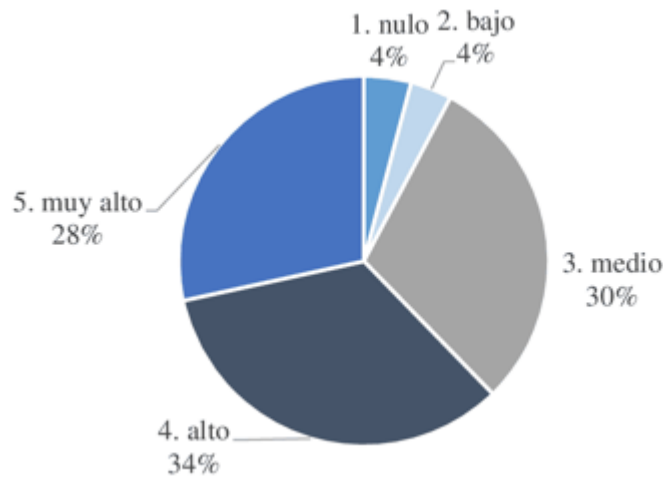
Results

Student life is governed by a process through which new knowledge is acquired, skills are developed and the human being is empowered; this process is accompanied by activities such as memorizing concepts, understanding processes, establishing relationships, applying and materializing ideas through the development of individual and team projects. The interaction of young people with their peers and the environment allows them to manage emotions that will allow them to meet goals and be resilient in the future. School activities are not separated from household chores; this process generates stress, because they must comply with various activities that are required by the process of developing responsibility as a person and as a professional in training.

For FCEA students (Fig. 1), only eight percent of the participants consider themselves to have a low level of stress or not to feel stressed, being mostly first year students of the Bachelor's Degree. The existing conditions in a student's life affect their health status and self-perception of stress, as they advance in the study program, the activities developed in the subjects and their approach to the work world cause a higher level of stress in the last semesters; 62% corresponding to 241 students indicated feeling

stressed at level four and five (the highest levels used in this study). The recognition of stress by young people implies that there are factors that destabilize their environment. This research shows that most young people relate academic activities with a change in their daily life and, therefore, it modifies their behavior in the family and in society.

Figure 1. Level of stress observed in students of the Faculty of Economic-Administrative Sciences



Source: Own elaboration

The research sample included 138 males and 249 females. This behavior is due to the fact that, in the faculty, the majority of the student population is female. In order to perform an analysis without bias due to the distribution of the population and the sample, the sexes were compared, dividing the sample into two groups and considering each of them as 100%.

The distribution of the total number of men according to their stress level shows that 38% of them report a level of three stress, which is lower than that of women (Table 2). Men studying administration, accounting, marketing and tourism considered themselves to have a level of three stress; however, in the Bachelor of International Business, 21.9% of men indicated having a level of five stress, while levels four and three only register less than six percent. In the same Bachelor of International Business, only 11.6% of women show a stress level equal to five. However, both men and women studying international business feel more stressed compared to students of other degrees. This is an important case for analysis since it is a demanding degree and both men and women perceive a high level of stress in it.

Table 2 shows the recognition by men of having a high level of stress compared to women, it is an example of the new education in young people to allow them to recognize part of their emotions and conditions that affect their development as students.

Table 2. Distribution in percentages by stress level between genders

Degree	% of men by stress level					% of women by stress level				
	1	2	3	4	5	1	2	3	4	5
Administration	1.5	0.7	13.1	5.1	0.7	0.8	0.8	8.0	9.2	2.8
Accountancy	2.2	1.5	8.8	4.4	2.2	2.0	1.6	5.2	7.6	4.4
Marketing	1.5	0.7	6.6	6.6	2.9	0.0	1.2	4.0	8.4	6.8
International Business	0.0	0.0	3.6	5.8	21.9	0.4	0.0	5.2	9.6	11.6
Tourism	0.0	1.5	5.8	2.2	0.7	0.4	0.0	2.8	4.4	2.8
Total	5.1	4.4	38.0	24.1	28.5	3.6	3.6	25.2	39.2	28.4

Source: own elaboration

The analysis by sex indicates that women are concentrated in the highest levels of stress, 39.2% indicated a scale with a value of 4% and 28.4% consider a value of five. Women, therefore, tend to show greater stress in the face of the activities they carry out at school; this behavior is linked to the elements that could generate stress. Educational models have considered that the grade a young person obtains during their education depends on the learning reflected in exams and through the presentation of final projects that demonstrate the student's skills and abilities to apply what they have learned. Young people must complete school activities and within them, final projects and the presentation of exams are the factors that most influence the stress reported by students.

Other factors such as obtaining a high average, applying for a scholarship to continue their studies and competition with peers are present in students, but in a lesser proportion, which indicates that young people have a lower risk of showing stress (Table 3).

Table 3. Most common factors that generate stress in students

Stressor	Average stress level
Final Project Delivery	3.71
Presentation of exams	3.48
Excessive number of hours spent at school	2.95
Family pressure for good performance	2.60
Enter class on time	2.54
Pressure from competing with peers	2.50
Get a scholarship	2.41
Speaking out loud (presentations)	2.38

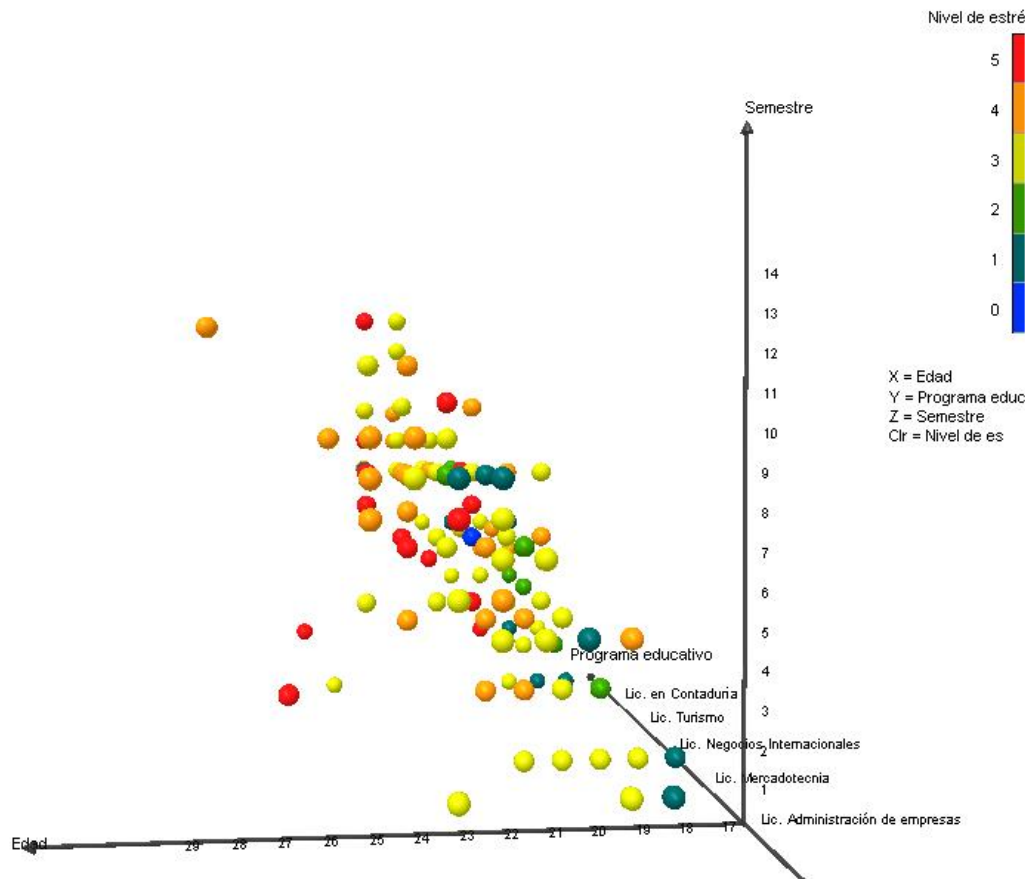
Source: own elaboration

The complexity of the activities and exams that students must take are related to the progress that young people have in their educational program. The Bachelor's programs of the FCEA consider in the last semesters social service, professional practices, completion of comprehensive training activities (AFI) that include participation in artistic and sports events, talks on health, nutrition, among others. Students must organize their time in such a way that they can complete professional subjects and extracurricular activities, implying a stress due to the time they have to complete all the activities that they must develop.

The simple linear regression shows a relationship between the semester and the stress level, considering an $\alpha = 0.05$. In this way, a first semester student shows a lower stress level than a sixth or eighth semester student. It can be expressed as follows: $E = 3.51 + 0.04 (S)$; where E is the stress level, S is the semester that the student is studying. For the estimator B_0 that corresponds to 3.51 it has a probability of 0.0000003 and for the estimator B_1 (0.04) a probability of 0.01 was obtained, the two estimators comply that they are less than 0.05 and are considered as estimators that make up the simple linear regression, in this regression it can be seen that as students advance in their studies the level of stress perceived by young people increases.

Figure 2 shows the relationship between the level of stress as the student progresses through the semester, with red and orange colors prevailing in the last semesters, while green prevails in younger students and in the first semesters of the Bachelor's Degree at the Faculty.

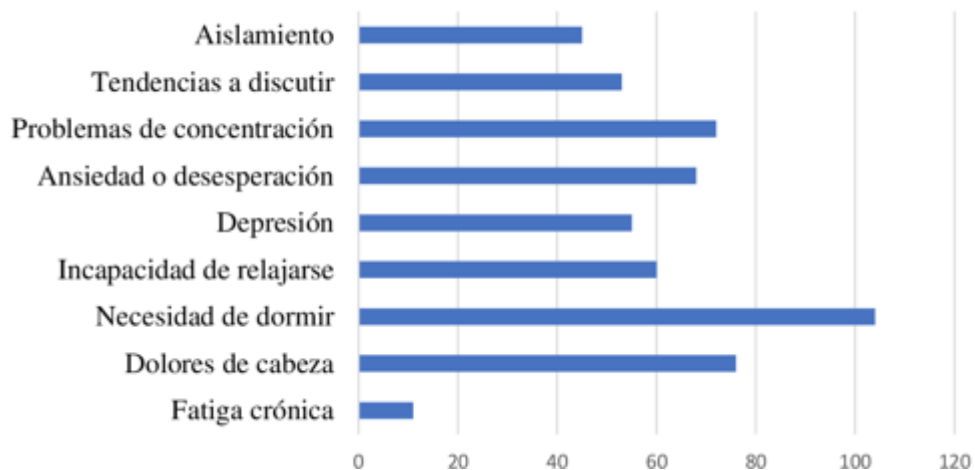
Figure 2. Stress level in students considering age, semester and degree



Source: own elaboration

The simple relationship between stress and the semester that students are taking is linked to the activities that young people face in later semesters (Figure 3); however, the individual must develop the ability to cope with stress and, according to the study, the most frequently reported stress-related problems were sleep problems, migraines, concentration problems and anxiety.

Figure 3. Most common problems in students with stress



Source: own elaboration



The study also analyzed the relationship between stress and the consumption of caffeine, nicotine, food and other substances that can affect the health of students. The results indicated that, among the young people interviewed, the consumption of coffee and nicotine increases; however, only among people who already consume the products. The student who has not consumed nicotine during his life maintains the same behavior, that is, stress as a result of school activities is not the cause of initiating the consumption of these products. Only two people indicated that feeling stressed has led them to seek the use of prohibited substances such as marijuana.

Regarding alcohol consumption, the young people interviewed do not modify their behavior. They indicate that the consumption of this product is independent of the stress they experience as a result of school activities and is more a part of the coexistence of their social circles.

Discussion

The reactions of young people to cope with stress, 45% of students indicated that they isolate themselves from people, 23% indicated listening to music and the rest doing activities such as sports, talking to relatives about their problems, crying to release the pressure they feel or simply entering a period of inactivity. According to Güler *et al.* (2021, p. 200) one way to cope with stress is through physical activity and exercise, which increases people's focus on appearing confident and optimistic.

The overall results show that men were at the middle level of stress (grade three), men less easily recognize a stressful situation and express it with restraint. Only in the case of young people studying international business, these results coincide with those of Martínez *et al.* (2019) who indicate that women cope with stress and perceive a higher level of support seeking while men have a coping focused on meaning. Miñan *et al.* (2023) found that young people who are more stressed use social media less in an addictive way.

The factors that trigger stress in the student population are the delivery of projects, the presentation of exams and the time they spend on schoolwork. These elements coincided with those indicated by Castillo *et al.* (2016, p.230) who highlight that the main sources of stress are academic overload, lack of time to complete academic activities and taking exams. Cano *et al.* (2016) find that teacher evaluations, homework overload and limited time to complete them are the main stressors for students. Like Cruz *et al.* (2024) consider that teacher evaluations are the greatest stressor for students.

Some studies such as Silva-Ramos *et al.*, (2020, p. 81) point out that stress affects the female population more with a focus on problems such as headaches, problems concentrating, feelings of depression and reluctance to do schoolwork. Other authors such as Zárata-Depraect *et al.* (2018) agree in their study that students were stressed by competing in class, academic overload, the character of the teacher, homework and the limited time to complete them. Saleh *et al.*, (2017) indicate that life satisfaction, optimism, self-esteem and psychological distress are the main elements that predict stress.

Conclusions

Stress in the university population ranges from medium to very high, with Likert scale values ranging from three to five, with five being the highest value. In a group analysis, women are usually more concerned about having better results and fulfilling their tasks, which generates greater stress and is demonstrated in four of the five degrees of the Faculty; except for International Business, in which men showed higher levels of stress compared to women.

Activities typical of university life such as final projects, exams and presentations generate stress in young people; however, men said that when they felt stressed they agreed or started to buy and consume marijuana, which is worrying for the educational institution. This element also led to a request to the faculty to implement talks with students about the problems derived from the consumption of substances harmful to their health.

While the study was being conducted, the University's tutoring program was giving talks about emotions. This fact allowed some of the men to agree to participate in the project and they answered more openly. This is noted because men are commonly labeled as weak or fragile if they recognize emotions. This fortuitous fact, which coincided with the study, allowed the faculty to propose more talks and workshops for men about stress and emotions, as a way of allowing them to be open to showing their emotions.

Future lines of research

The new studies propose to continue the study on stress management in young university students, focusing on the techniques they use to relax when they feel stressed and whether they have obtained this technique externally or through talks or workshops given by the Psychopedagogical Department of the university. The objective will be to

verify whether talks and workshops on emotional management allow young people to better cope with stress.

Another element that must be studied is the consumption of prohibited substances by students, to identify the sources of this contact and the frequency of consumption. This is in order to implement talks and workshops to address this element within the university or take actions to prevent contact within the university with these substances.

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