Exploring Perceived Stress and its Antecedents Among the Young Population with Special Reference to Sri Lanka's Economic Collapse

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Abstract

This research article focuses on the issue of perceived stress among the youth population in Sri Lanka, specifically in relation to the country's recent economic collapse. The study aims to investigate the factors that contribute to perceived stress and identify the stress management strategies employed by young people. Its primary objective is to comprehend the impact of the economic crisis on the youth and provide insights for interventions and support systems. Data collection involved crowdsourcing and simple random sampling techniques, resulting in a sample of 601 participants. The Perceived Stress Scale was used to collect data, which was analyzed using objective descriptive statistics. The findings revealed that a significant number of participants in the western province reported high levels of perceived stress. Thematic analysis was applied to identify the main causes of perceived stress among the participants. The analysis highlighted a negative response towards the economic crisis and inflation as major contributors to stress levels. Additionally, a word cloud analysis was conducted to identify stress management strategies and coping mechanisms, with the word "support" emerging as a predominant theme. The key results indicate levels of perceived stress among the youth population in Sri Lanka, directly linked to the recent economic collapse. This emphasizes the urgent need for interventions and support systems to address the psychological well-being of young individuals in post-crisis scenarios. The findings on stress management strategies and coping mechanisms offer valuable insights for the design and implementation of targeted programs aimed at alleviating perceived stress among the young population. In conclusion, this research highlights the significant impact of the economic collapse on the perceived stress levels of the youth population in Sri Lanka.

Keywords: Economic crisis, Perceived stress, Sri Lanka, Young adults

INTRODUCTION

Sri Lanka is a country that has a developing economy (Patabendige & Senanayake, 2015). But, at this moment, the economy of Sri Lanka is struggling with several issues. Stein et al. (2013) have analyzed that there are negative effects due to the economic crisis which are, an increase in unemployment, and people leaving the country. Unemployment was found to be the causal factor behind a nine-fold rise in suicide rates compared to other consequences of the economic crisis, such as inflation (Mathieu et al., 2022). Many researchers have proved that the economic crisis of a country has the ability to affect the mental health of its citizens. In the economic crisis of Greece in 2009, the Quality of Life in Greece badly affected to physical health and mental health of human beings (Kokaliari, 2018).

Furthermore, according to the article published in Sunday Morning newspaper by Chamara (2022) indicates some peoples' thoughts regarding this economic crisis states, "We cannot afford to use fuel as we used to. The main reason is the limited supply of fuel, because of which we have to spend a significantly higher amount of time to get a significantly lesser amount of fuel. The other reason is the inflation of all other essential goods, which compelled us to rethink how much money we can allocate for fuel. As a result, we have had to limit using our personal vehicle unless the entire family wants to travel." (Chamara, 2022, p.3).

Perceived stress is linked to unemployment adjustment, with higher levels associated with decreased optimism in seeking new job opportunities (Brouskeli & Markos, 2013). Perceived stress was significantly related to mental health and physical health such as depression, general health, and health symptoms (Brouskeli & Markos, 2013). In addition, the researchers have shown, due to higher level of perceived stress, depression can be increased, and general health can be worsened (Flores et al., 2008). A study about young adults in college, has analyzed that there is a co-relation of students' self-reports of particular financial behaviors and penetration of financial well-being and economic stress

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(Stein et al., 2013). Perceived stress can be affected to young adult's life satisfaction. Further, perceived stress in school can be related to life satisfaction of young adults. In school education system, the stress that relates to school can be affected to young adults' educational activities (Burger & Samuel, 2017). According to Priyadarshana (2022 p.2), Psychobiological stress responses include behavioral, physiological, affective, and cognitive reactions to challenging situations, influencing coping, emotions, and health.

The period in an economic crisis can be affected to lives of human beings (Kokaliari, 2018). Due to the country's past wrong economic tactics and the corruption of corrupt rulers, the youth of countries like Sri Lanka has to suffer mentally and physically in this economic crisis. A study has identified that there is a close association between offensive effects that relates to economic crisis and the mental health of people (Mouza, 2015). In the current state of the Sri Lankan economy, people are facing numerous challenges that impact their daily lives, including fuel queues, gas shortages, inflation, power failures, changes in lifestyle, and travel restrictions. These circumstances contribute to a stressful, anxious, and depressed atmosphere, with limited access to basic necessities such as transportation and medicines (Priyadarshana, 2022:2). Similarly, some young adults had been committed suicide and also some young adults had been killed because of people's stress levels in this economic crisis. In Greece, based on the economic crisis, the study shows that there are increases in mental health problems and suicide rates (Faresjö et al., 2013). If focusing on young adults in Sri Lanka, are being lived with perceived stress in this economic crisis. A real-time example can be identified is the struggle that was started among young adults in the months between February to July, which can be recognized as the highest level of perceived stress on young adults in the Sri Lankan economic crisis.

This issue was a pristine gray area, and the study indicated a context-related gap because there was not any study in respect of the current economic collapse in Sri Lanka. Therefore, this study exclusively analyzed perceived stress on young adults in this recent economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Theoretical Background

Cohen's stress theory revolves around the concept of perception rather than events themselves. Unlike traditional approaches that emphasize life events or their quantity, this theory acknowledges individual differences by enabling us to assess and evaluate our subjective emotional experiences (3icreative, 2011). By pointing out a lack of data on perceived stress among young adults during the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka, this section provides the importance of this study with novel contributions which are not done in past literature. However, there were very limited pieces of evidence that research had been done in respect of the economic crisis in Sri Lanka by both Sri Lankan and foreign researchers, but also the researchers of this study could not find any researches who have been done on the perceived stress during this economic crisis in Sri Lanka.

Prevalence of Stress

A study has found that in the situation, which is the prevalence rate before the crisis, there were higher prevalence rates of mental health issues and stress among pupils during pandemic situation that related to Covid-19.

Furthermore, the study shows that mindfulness, optimism and coping strategies can be identified as protective factors and also stressors that related to Covid-19 such as worries in respect of financial matters and education, being stressed due to covid pandemic and media reporting and quarantine experience, and personal characteristics such as being female, older age and neuroticism can be identified as risk factors mental health issues and stress among pupils (Karing, 2021). According to Amu et al. (2021), the prevalence of a mental health issue was 9.7% for stress. This finding can be described through the differences in cultural practices such as beliefs and meals. Although, the profession also statistically prognosticates stress. Risk factors of mental health matters due to profession such as low motivation, low self-esteem, physical or emotional exhaustion due to excess workload, and long working hours at workplaces for existing stress.

According to Alqarni et al. (2022), the study has investigated that there were variable results on the prevalence of stress and burnout among mental health professionals. As an example, a study in Singapore showed that healthcare workers who worked in mental health backgrounds had a higher level of stress which raised considerably depending on demographic factors, such as younger age, low annual income, and low experience. On the other hand, another study indicates that the prevalence of stress ranges from 5.5% to 25.9% among educators in colleges or universities. The study has identified risk factors which are, sex, educational level, ethnicity, and religion as risk factors for stress among educators in Malaysian higher learning institutions. Similarly, males had a higher level of prevalence of stress with comparing to females nevertheless low level of education was concerned with low levels of stress (Tai et al., 2019).

Perceived Stress

Perceived Stress defines as unexpected feelings about human lifestyles, unable to manage daily challenges, and feeling about piling up of people's problems (Dissing et al., 2019). Perez et al. (2015) have stated that perceived stress is a construction that considers cognitively interfered emotive response is caused for people who are facing in a stressful life event. Many studies have examined life satisfaction in older adults and identified it as an important indicator of successful development in order adults' well-being. And because young adults' life satisfaction takes a face many developmental and adjustment challenges including their transition to adulthood. Therefore, it often affects their life satisfaction. This study also analyzes whether and to what extent adolescents' lives are analyzed, and to what extent anxiety is now satisfied with study and general self-efficacy. Here the main sources can be obtained from studies and young adults' perceived stress (Burger & Samuel, 2017). Perceived stress, as mentioned by past researchers, is often and mainly caused by economic difficulties and psychological distress. And it has been confirmed in the researchers' findings that young adults mainly must face this situation when they are looking for a job and losing their current job (Brouskeli & Markos, 2013).

Moreover, another group of researchers stated that as a first-time discovery, they have stated that the difference between the gender in adapting to this perceived stress situation is more likely to affect the female community according to their theories (Flores et al., 2008). Also, as mentioned by past researchers, this perceived stress situation can be said to be faced widely among the young

adult community in society based on factors such as their academics and applying for the limited jobs available in the country (Burger & Samuel, 2017). According to analysis by Perez et al. (2015), they have found the consequences of perceived stress such as alcohol, cigarettes, poor eating patterns, and poor sleeping patterns, which can be negatively caused to people's health behaviors. Similarly, perceived stress can be affected the health of people based on some symptoms such as headache, anxiety, depression, irritability, weariness, chest stiffness, sexual dysfunction, menstrual disorders, indigestion, and giddiness. By the data and information received in research conducted by a group of Indian researchers, the most perceived stress situation for men and women has been reported based on issues such as influencing. In the same way, the researchers have reported that representing such influencers in society, how the perceived stress situation affects each individual, and the ability to measure the perceived stress situation (Singh & Nayak, 2015).

Perceived Stress on Young Adults

The consequences which consist of sleep can be directly or indirectly caused to an increment in perceived stress on young adults, which could be generated bad effects such as poor academic performance, dropout, and effects on mental health and physical health. In cross-sectional studies in respect of young adults, there is an association between higher levels of perceived stress and insomnia appearances (Veeramachaneni et al., 2019). The researchers have emphasized that Young Greek adults were at a higher level of perceived. The environment, that young Greek adults are living in under economic and social distress, has shown a significantly higher level of perceived stress (Faresjö et al., 2013). A study has analyzed whether self-efficacy has the ability that reduces the bad effects of perceived stress on the life satisfaction of young people. Perceived stress in education sensitizes to life satisfaction of young people. Similarly, in the school environment, young people who have low levels of self-efficacy, are unable to work with perceived stress which affects them to leave post-compulsory education early as an offensive incident (Burger & Samuel, 2017).

According to the researchers age-related shifts in stressor assessment are plausible in both directions. On the other hand, age-related resources may allow older workers to rate the demands of their peers as less stressful than their younger counterparts (Rauschenbach et al., 2013). Similarly, researchers have suggested that occupational stress and problems of mental health, concern ambitious young employees significantly. Further, as a probable result of mental health problems, lack of support by management, and stressful working environments, young employees have been mentioned to less stressful work as an encouragement to continue their occupation after retirement (Pillay et al., 2010).

Factors Affecting Perceived Stress

Perceived in relation to previous research, an improvement in grant issues affecting stressors has been noted. That is, mainly racism is introduced as a matter that directly affects this and the researchers note that due to this, it will affect the social condition and mental condition of individuals (Flores et al., 2008). As mentioned by Burger and Samuel (2017), it has been confirmed in those studies that inflation and economic crises will cause a big change in the stress situation of the people. As per the data found in the year 2005 by other research conducted in relation to the

classification of the Latin people, the researchers have mentioned the stress situation that the non-Hispanic white people have suffered due to the marginalization of the Latin people and especially due to their strong belief in religion (Perez et al., 2015). According to the researchers, due to students not managing their money properly, money is wasted unnecessarily. Due to this, it has been shown that students are suffering from various addictions and are under severe stress without being able to manage their money (Bamforth et al., 2017).

Researchers pointed out various factors as influencing factors for this, Stress is caused by many factors in family leisure work economic situation, and political situation. A variety of activities can also be the source of a person's daily stress as a better explanation of the relationship between relaxation and stress. Researchers have shown a significant impact of frequent experiences of daily stress on mental well-being through the value of rest (Kim & Lee, 2018). Further, those researchers have shown that students studying architecture in Turkey are stressed due to various reasons. As the reasons, the researchers have pointed out that they have suffered severe mental problems and panic due to the educational system about professional pressure. Other researchers have also shown that students seek treatment for mental health problems for these reasons (Gümüşburun Ayalp & Çivici, 2020). Moreover, as the researchers point out, job stress has been mentioned. Job stress can occur when employees are asked by their company to perform roles and tasks beyond their capabilities and expectations. Factors affecting this include heavy workload role problems and job insecurity and stress can also occur due to environmental conditions in the workplace (Chua et al., 2022). Greek teachers often refer to current professional stressors such as excessive classrooms, students' lack of motivation, poor achievement, and students' disciplinary problems that are difficult to deal with in classrooms (Antoniou et al., 2006).

Perceived Stress during an Economic Crisis

According to Thern et al. (2017), between 1990 and 1994, Sweden was in a deep economic crisis. The unemployment rate, which was 3.4% since 1990, has risen to 19% by 1993. The severe economic crisis has similarly increased inflation. This reason appears to have directly affected perceived stress. The researcher of the study points out that the mental health of young children and the increase in smoking and alcohol consumption shows how the economic collapse is increasing perceived stress. A study conducted by Kwon et al. (2003), shows that, In the late 1990s, Korea experienced a sudden economic downturn that dramatically affected everyday life. The study has focused more on analyzing the perceived stress that economic collapse puts on a family. Based on the researchers' opinion, the main causes of stress are reduced income, emotional distress, and marital life, and high unemployment rates. This study examined the effects of the Korean economic crisis, focusing on the interrelationships among economic stress, emotional distress, and family stress.

Based on a study Economic crisis is a major factor, which leads to unstable economic states and Thus results in stress among the individual and overall population. Economic-related stress can be identified as the feeling of stress due to the current state of one's personal finances and/or due to fear about the economy. Several studies have been done to identify the change of stress during the economic crisis. Research done in 2015, shows That people experience

higher levels of stress, depression, and a likelihood to adopt unhealthy lifestyles like smoking and eating unhealthily, which may raise the mortality risk associated with times of economic difficulty and increased unemployment (Torbica et al., 2015). Iceland faced an economic crisis in 2008. When compared to 2007 levels, age-adjusted mean perceived stress levels among females increased significantly in 2009, but not among males. This led to an increase in the number of reports of high-stress levels in females, but not in males, during the crisis in 2009 (Glonti et al., 2015). Another study looked at the rise in suicide rates during the economic crisis. According to that, psychological illness/mental un-stability is the biggest predictor of suicide, however, stressful situations like losing one's work can also become a major factor for leads to suicide (Merzagora et al., 2016).

Stress Management Strategies and Coping Mechanisms

Coping mechanisms can be defined which control deliberate, known efforts and adapt to stressors, can be affected by a variety of factors. The researchers analyzed the individuals who were born in Mexico, most people among those individuals were encouraged to use positive reframing, rejection, and religion as coping mechanisms, but fewer people among those individuals were encouraged to use self-distraction and narcotic abuse compared with Non-Hispanic Whites. It indicates a combination of perceived stress and various coping styles but participants. There can be existed an uncertainty that becomes perceived stress and depression among Latino people, but that population has less knowledge in respect of the use of coping mechanisms. Moreover, the researchers indicated that to execute an eligible and sensitive model of protection that enhances physical and mental health, it is important to have sound knowledge regarding the stressors and use of coping mechanisms (Perez et al., 2015). On the other hand, when considering the effect of discrimination as a stressful factor, males use various coping strategies in dealing with discrimination than females, and males may be faced some unhealthy effects such as poor health that those coping strategies are unable to reduce physical symptoms (Flores et al., 2008).

According to Dissing et al. (2019), obtaining social support from familiar social relations can be identified as a recognized coping strategy. Coping methods such as secular coping and religious coping can be utilized to control stressful reasons for adults. The researchers have identified the difference between active types of coping that includes problem-solving and emotion-focused coping strategies that include distraction or omission in order to stress and coping literature (Stein et al., 2013). Doing exercise continuously is a better stress management strategy, that helps to maintain low levels of stress (Brouskeli & Markos, 2013). Another study demonstrates that over the course of a person's life, they develop a certain set of coping mechanisms to deal with the unpleasant and painful emotions brought on by typical and unplanned situations. Over time, reactions that relieve stress may be reinforced and conditioned, leading to the formation of attitudinal and behavioral orientations (Moschis et al., 2011).

When considering the Sri Lankan context, there was not any research in respect of perceived stress during the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka, but the researchers of this study had identified considerable studies regarding perceived stress or stress during economic recessions or crises in foreign countries when studying the literature review of this study.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Due to the exploratory nature of this research, this study utilized the deductive approach because the researchers planned to continue this study based on existing literature in the literature review. An exploratory study is a type of study, that identifies what is happening and obtains knowledge in respect of a topic of interest, by asking open questions. When someone does not sure precisely of the nature of the problem, this study would be beneficial to clarify the understanding of the problem (Thornhill et al., 2012).

To meet the research objectives of this study, the mixed method uses includes both qualitative and quantitative research methods. According to Thornhill et al. (2012), the mixed method can be connected with various methods which are from simple, convergent structures to complex or fully integrated structures.

Since the study intends to conduct quantitative analysis for the first objective and qualitative analysis for the second and third objectives, a sequential mixed methods design was utilized. In this design, the researchers first collect and analyze quantitative data to investigate the prevalence of stress among the young population. Once this phase is complete, the researcher then proceeds to the qualitative phase, collecting and analyzing qualitative data to explore causes for perceived stress and analyze stress management strategies and coping mechanisms.

Researchers of the study analyzed young adults in Sri Lanka who are between 15 years to 35 years of age category and are living in all districts of Sri Lanka as the target population of this study. According to Wikipedia (2022), youth consider an age category that is between 15 years to 35 years in African youth charter. 4.64 Million can be identified as current young adults in Sri Lanka (Department of Census & Statistics, 2019). Therefore, researchers considered 4.64 million as the population size of the research.

The sample of the study focused on young adults who are facing this economic crisis in Sri Lanka that include 601 participants as the sample size according to Morgan's table. The sample size was calculated with a 95% confidence interval at a 4% margin of error. The researchers adopted Crowdsourcing and Simple Random Sampling methods to conduct the research for analyzing quantitative data and the Snowball Sampling method for analyzing qualitative data. The sample obtained as covering all districts in Sri Lanka.

Commonly, a cross-sectional study can be defined as a type of study in which the data are gathered just once or maybe over a period of days or weeks, or months, for answering a research question (Space, 2013). According to this study, researchers gathered data through questionnaires and in-depth interviews at once.

When focusing on methods of data collection, the researchers used only primary data collection methods. The primary data was gathered from questionnaires which were beneficial to obtain speedy responses from respondents. The questionnaires using PSS-14 measurement were used to analyze the prevalence of stress among young adults. This questionnaire was sent to a sample of 601 participants through a Google form. The Google form link is shared among social media such as WhatsApp and Facebook. This method was useful to obtain direct data from the participants which is more accurate, complete, reliable, and timeliness. Although, the study utilized In-depth interviews

via face-to-face interviews as the primary data collection method for obtaining qualitative data.

The study explained the following sampling methods, data collection methods, and data analysis tools and methods under each research objective of the research briefly.

For the first objective, the researchers employed questionnaires distributed through Google Forms, shared via popular social media platforms like WhatsApp and Facebook. Descriptive statistics were used to analyze the data, utilizing MS Excel. The prevalence of stress was measured through frequency and percentage tables. The study employed crowdsourcing and simple random sampling methods to investigate stress prevalence among young adults and analyze quantitative data. Crowdsourcing sampling allowed for a larger and more diverse audience. The researchers focused on 1000 participants from all districts in Sri Lanka, utilizing Facebook and WhatsApp for crowdsourcing sampling based on the study's population size. From the 1000 participants, a sample size of 601 was selected using the simple random sampling method. The crowdsourcing sampling method utilized social media platforms, specifically WhatsApp and Facebook, to select the 1000 participants.

Regarding the second objective, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect qualitative data from 12 participants. These face-to-face interviews aimed to explore the causes of perceived stress. The data was analyzed manually through thematic analysis. Snowball sampling was used to gather data for identifying the causes of perceived stress.

For the third objective, in-depth interviews were also conducted to collect qualitative data from 12 participants. These face-to-face interviews aimed to explore stress management strategies and coping mechanisms. The data was analyzed using an online tool called Word It Out, which facilitated word cloud analysis. Word cloud analysis provided a quick and purposive analysis of the qualitative data. Snowball sampling was used to obtain data for identifying stress management strategies and coping mechanisms.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Background Characteristics of Study Population

This study mainly focuses on exploring perceived stress and its antecedents among the young population with special reference to Sri Lanka's economic collapse. according to that, based on 1st specific objective which is, the prevalence of stress among young adults who are between 15 to 35 years of age category, this study investigated the prevalence of stress based on demographic factors which are related to the theoretical framework. The below table summarizes the demographic characteristics of the 601 as the sample size surveyed in the research.

Table 1: Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

Demographic factor	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Geographical Location		
Ampara	4	0.67%
Anuradhapura	10	1.66%
Badulla	11	1.83%
Batticaloa	12	2.00%
Colombo	98	16.31%
Galle	19	3.16%
Gampaha	49	8.15%
Hambantota	23	3.83%
Jaffna	13	2.16%
Kaluthara	17	2.83%
Kandy	19	3.16%
Kegalle	19	3.16%
Kilinochchi	22	3.66%
Kurunagala	27	4.49%
Mannar	21	3.49%
Matale	17	2.83%
Matara	35	5.82%
Monaragala	20	3.33%
Mullative	7	1.16%
Nuwara Eliya	11	1.83%
Polonnaruwa	8	1.33%
Puttalam	9	1.50%
Rathnapura	112	18.64%

Trincomalee	7	1.16%
Vavuniya	11	1.83%
Gender		
Male	308	51.25%
Female	293	48.75%
Marital Status		
Divorced	20	3.30%
Married	127	21.10%
Never married	435	72.40%
Widowed	19	3.20%
Educational level		
Degree, Diploma or above	410	68.22%
GCE A/L pass	100	16.64%
GCE O/L pass	17	2.83%
Grade 12-13	29	4.83%
Grade 6-10	7	1.16%
No schooling	8	1.33%
Vocational qualifications	30	4.99%
University nature (Only if follow)		
Non-State (Private)	238	49.58%
State	242	50.42%
Employment status		
Contributing family worker	5	0.83%
Government employee	45	7.49%
Private sector permanent employee	182	30.28%
Private sector temporary or casual worker	54	8.99%
Retired	3	0.50%
Self-employed	64	10.65%
Semi-government employee	7	1.16%
Student	193	32.11%
Unemployed	48	7.99%
Monthly income		
Rs.0 - Rs .50 000	409	68.05%
Rs. 51 000 - Rs. 100 000	113	18.80%
Rs. 101 000 - Rs. 150 000	44	7.32%
Above Rs.151 000	35	5.82%

Source: Authors' Compilation

According to Table 1, the survey assessed seven demographic factors: geographical location, gender, marital status, education level, university nature, employment status, and monthly income of respondents. There were twenty-five district categories, with the majority of participants (18.64%) coming from Rathnapura. The gender distribution was roughly equal, with slightly more males (51.25%) than females (48.75%). Most young adults in Sri Lanka were pursuing a bachelor's degree diploma or above (68.22%), while the least prevalent group had below GCE A/L qualifications (31.78%). Respondents pursuing a degree or diploma were split between state universities (50.42%) and non-state universities (49.58%). The largest employment status group was students (32.11%), followed by private sector permanent employees (30.28%) and self-employed individuals (10.65%). Most respondents earned between Rs.0 - Rs.50,000 per month (68.05%), while the remaining 31.95% earned above Rs.50,000 per month.

Karunaratne, Mathota, Kumara, Thanayamwaththa, Dunuwila and Shamila, 2023.

Reliability Test

Table 2: Reliability test

Cronbach's Alpha	Cronbach's Alpha Based on Standardized Items	No of Items
0.897	0.897	14

Source: Authors' Compilation

Table 2 shows that the value of Cronbach's Alpha of 14 items used in this study is 0.897. According to Cronbach's Alpha value range, normally, the reliability of the data should be equal or higher than 0.6. But, if focusing on this study, it indicates 0.897 which the value is higher than 0.6. Therefore, the Cronbach's Alpha value of this study has been proved that the reliability of the data in this study is "Good" because the value (Cronbach's Alpha) is between 0.7 and 0.9.

Validity Test

Table 3: Validity test

KMO and Bartlett's Test		
Kaiser-Meyer-Olkin Measure of Sampling Adequacy		0.821
Bartlett's Test of Sphericity	Approx. Chi-Square	254.670
	df	91
	Sig.	.000

Source: Authors' Compilation

According to Table 3, KMO is a test conducted to analyze the strength of partial correlation between the variables. According to the KMO measurement, values closer to 1.0 are acceptable while values less than 0.5 are unacceptable. Table 4.2 represents, the result of the study, it has a KMO value of 0.821. This value indicates that the validity of the data in the study is high and acceptable which means the data are "Meritorious" because the KMO value is between 0.8 and 0.9.

Prevalence of Stress Based on Demographic Factors through Descriptive Statistics

Stress Level Based on Province

The data presented in Figure 1 indicates significant variability in the prevalence of high, low, and moderate stress across various provinces in Sri Lanka. Specifically, the Northern and Uva provinces exhibit the lowest percentage of individuals experiencing low stress, while the Sabaragamuwa and Central provinces show a moderate percentage of individuals experiencing low stress. On the other hand, the Southern and Western provinces display a relatively high percentage of individuals experiencing low stress. The findings from Figure 1 further demonstrate that the Western province has the highest percentage of individuals experiencing high stress, followed by the Sabaragamuwa province. In contrast, the Eastern and Uva provinces demonstrate the lowest percentage of individuals experiencing high stress. Other provinces reveal a moderate percentage of individuals experiencing high stress.

It is important to highlight that the provinces of North Central and Northwestern provinces consistently exhibit low levels of individuals experiencing low stress. Moreover, the Sabaragamuwa province reports the highest moderate levels of individuals experiencing moderate stress, with Northern and Southern provinces also showing elevated levels compared to other provinces. Overall, the data depicted in Figure 1 underscores the substantial variation in stress levels across districts in Sri Lanka, suggesting potential influences such as education level, income, and employment status among other factors.

Figure 1: Stress level based on province
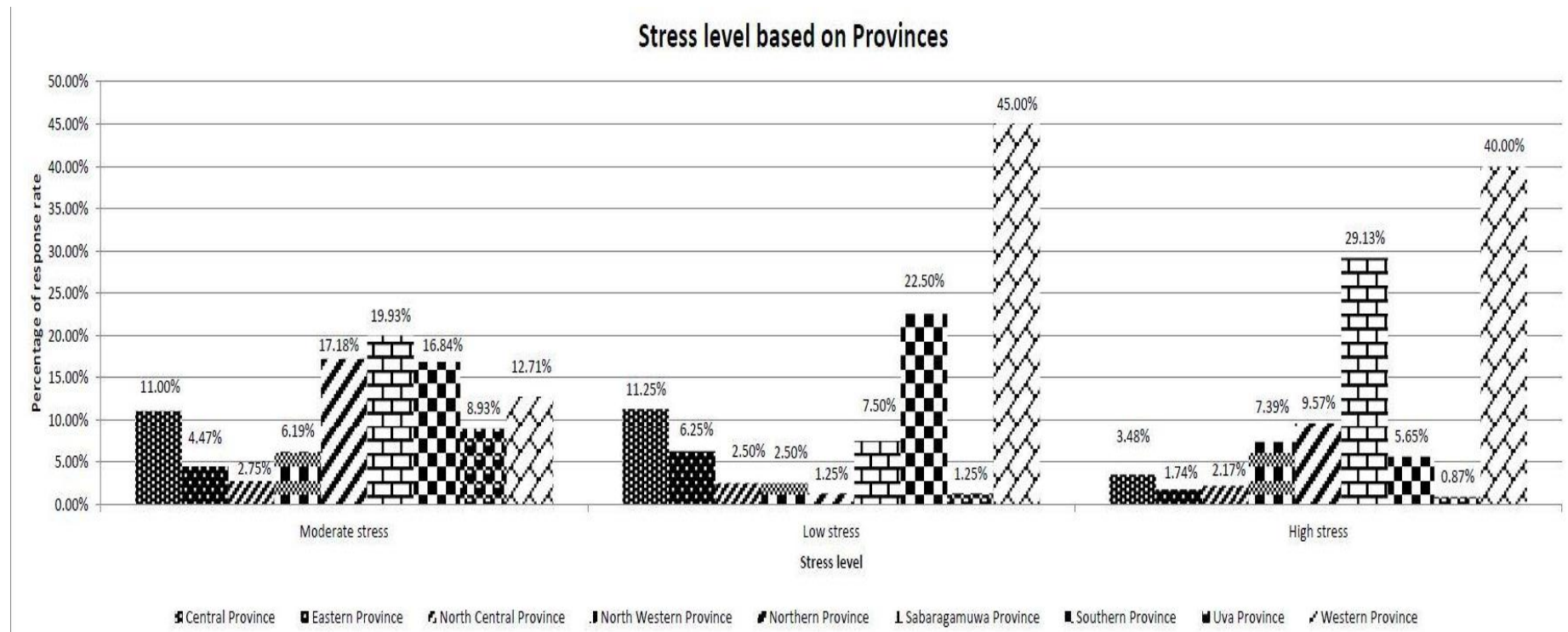
Source: Authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Gender

Based on Table 4 the given data, it appears that both males and females experience moderate stress levels the most, with 151 males and 141 females, respectively. The number of males experiencing high stress levels is higher than that of females (141 versus 88), while the number of females experiencing low stress levels is higher than that of males (47 versus 33).

Table 4: Stress level based on gender

Gender	High stress	Low stress	Moderate stress	Total
Female	88	47	141	276
Male	141	33	151	325
Grand Total	229	80	292	601

Source: Authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Marital Status

Based on Table 5 presented, it is evident that stress levels among young adults are influenced by their marital status. Individuals who are divorced have a higher likelihood of experiencing high-stress levels, as evidenced by 21 respondents reporting high-stress levels compared to only 2 who reported low-stress levels. In contrast, for those who are married, the distribution of stress levels is more diverse. Out of the 167 married respondents, 63 reported high-stress levels, 68 reported moderate stress levels, and also 36 reported low-stress levels.

Notably, those who have never been married reported the highest levels of stress overall, with 134 reporting high-stress levels, 44 reporting low-stress levels, and 214 reporting moderate stress levels. Lastly, respondents who are widowed had 11 reporting high-stress levels and 8 reporting moderate stress levels. Therefore, the data reveals that stress levels are significantly affected by marital status, with unmarried individuals having higher stress levels overall.

Table 5: Stress level based on marital status

Marital status	High stress	Low stress	Moderate stress
Divorced	21	N/A	2
Married	63	36	68
Never Married	134	44	214
Widowed	11	N/A	8
Grand Total	229	80	292

Source: Authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Educational Level

According to the presented Table 6, there appears to be a correlation between the educational level and stress levels of young adults. The findings indicate that individuals with higher educational attainment (i.e., Degree, Diploma, or above) report elevated levels of moderate stress, with a total of 169 participants belonging to this category. In contrast, those with lower levels of educational attainment report reduced levels of stress, with a total of 53 participants falling into the low-stress category.

Furthermore, the data suggest that individuals with vocational qualifications exhibit a higher propensity for moderate stress, with 24 participants identified within this group. These findings highlight the potential relationship between educational achievement and stress levels, indicating a need for further exploration and investigation into the underlying mechanisms and factors that contribute to this relationship.

**Table 6: Stress level based on educational level**

Education level	High stress	Low stress	Moderate stress
Degree, Diploma, or above	189	53	169
GCE A/L pass	26	18	47
GCE O/L pass	N/A	2	17
Grade 12-13	6	3	22
Grade 6-10	N/A	N/A	9
No schooling	2	N/A	4
Vocational qualifications	6	4	24
Grand total	229	80	292

Source: Authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Type of University

Based on Figure 2, the findings of the study investigating the relationship between economic and political crises and stress levels among young adults in Sri Lanka, it was observed that there exists a significant variation in stress levels based on the type of university attended by the respondents. The study revealed that among students enrolled in non-state (private) universities, 39.20% reported high levels of stress, while 67.69% and 55.50% reported low and moderate levels of stress, respectively. Conversely, students enrolled in state universities reported comparatively higher levels of stress, with 60.80% indicating high levels of stress, 32.31% reporting low levels, and 44.50% indicating moderate levels of stress. These findings suggest that students attending state universities may experience elevated levels of stress compared to their counterparts attending non-state (private) universities during times of economic and political crises in Sri Lanka.

Figure 2: Stress levels based on type of university
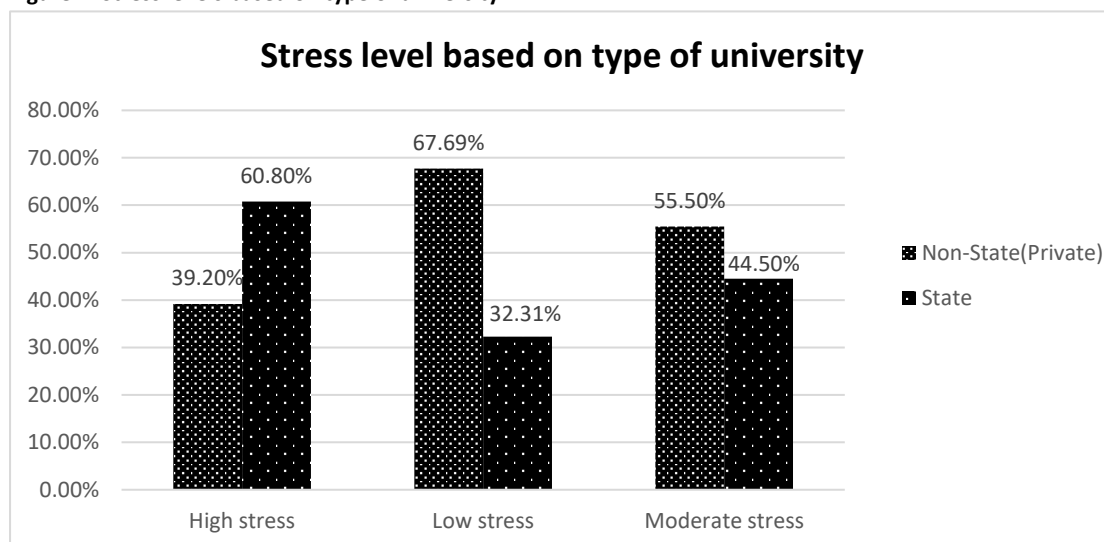
Source: authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Employment Status

Table 7 presented suggests that stress levels among young adults exhibit variations depending on their employment status. In the private sector, permanent employees reported the highest levels of stress, with 56 participants indicating high stress, 99 participants reporting moderate stress, and 22 participants reporting low stress. Similarly, self-employed individuals reported high levels of stress, with 14 participants indicating high stress, 41 participants reporting moderate stress, and 7 participants reporting low stress. Government employees also reported high levels of stress, with 7 participants indicating high stress, 29 participants reporting moderate stress, and 4 participants reporting low stress. Temporary or casual workers in the private sector also experienced high levels of stress, with 13 participants indicating high stress, 42 participants reporting moderate stress, and 1 participant reporting low stress.

If considering the government sector and private sector, there are a higher number of employees who are in the private sector, experiencing a higher level of high stress than employees in the government sector. However, students exhibited the highest levels of stress overall, with 91 participants indicating high stress, 76 participants reporting moderate stress, and 39 participants reporting low stress.

Table 7: Stress level based on employment status

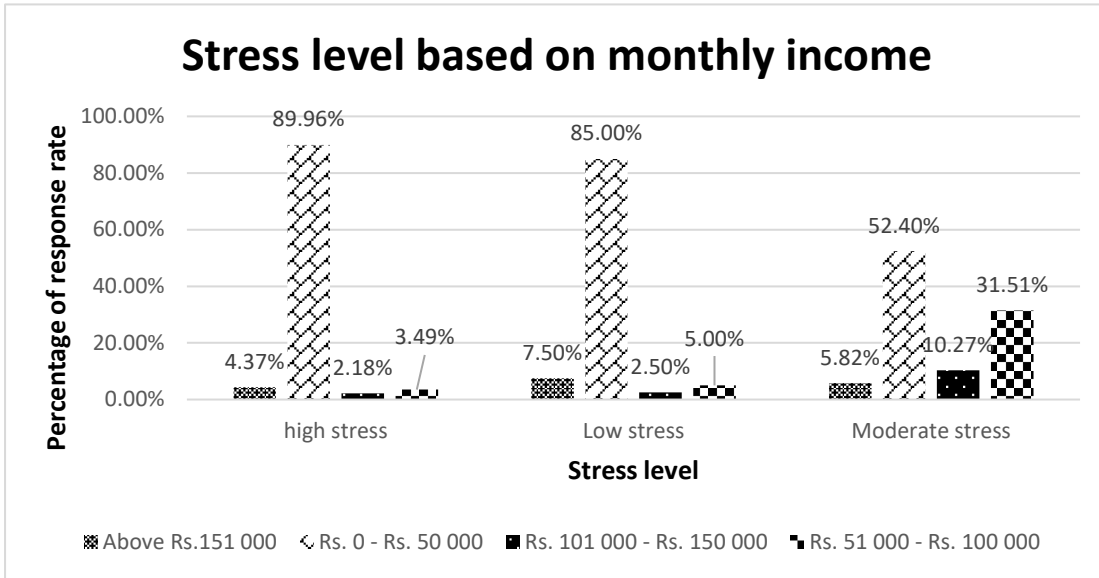| Employment status	High stress	Low stress	Moderate stress
Contributing family worker	N/A	2	2
Government employee	7	4	29
Private sector permanent employee	56	22	99
Private sector temporary or casual worker	13	1	42
Retired	N/A	2	N/A
Self-employed	14	7	41
Semi-government employee	1	2	3
Student	91	39	76
Unemployed	43	1	4
Grand Total	225	80	296

Source: Authors' Compilation

Stress Level Based on Monthly Income

Figure 3 shows findings on the prevalence of stress among young adults in Sri Lanka, categorized by their monthly income. The results demonstrate that individuals with a monthly income exceeding Rs. 151,000 manifest a lower level of stress, with a mere 4.37% reporting high stress and 5.82% reporting moderate stress. Conversely, those with a monthly income ranging from Rs. 0 to Rs. 50,000 experience the highest levels of stress, whereas showing a higher level of moderate stress than other salary ranges.

Moreover, those who are earning less than Rs. 100,000, illustrate higher levels of stress even though represent lower stress levels, rather than individuals who are earning more than Rs.100,000. Overall, these findings suggest that Sri Lankan young adults belonging to lower income groups are more prone to stress, with the highest levels observed among those earning between Rs.0 to Rs. 50,000.

Figure 3: Stress levels based on monthly income

Stress level based on monthly income

Legend:
- ▨ Above Rs.151 000
- ⌵ Rs. 0 - Rs. 50 000
- ■ Rs. 101 000 - Rs. 150 000
- ◥ Rs. 51 000 - Rs. 100 000

X-axis: Stress level (high stress, Low stress, Moderate stress)
Y-axis: Percentage of response rate

Values:
- high stress: 4.37%, 89.96%, 2.18%, 3.49%
- Low stress: 7.50%, 85.00%, 2.50%, 5.00%
- Moderate stress: 5.82%, 52.40%, 10.27%, 31.51%

Source: Authors' Compilation

Causes for Perceived Stress through Thematic Analysis

To analyze causes for perceived stress, in-depth interviews were conducted to collect the required qualitative data. The interview process was conducted in order to procure the requisite qualitative data. The interviewing process encompassed a cohort of 12 young adults falling within the age bracket of 15 to 35 years. Each interview was duly recorded subsequent to obtaining the interviewee's explicit consent. The outcomes gleaned from the respondents were transcribed and subjected to scrutiny employing Braun and Clarke's thematic analysis approach (Braun and Clarke, 2006) comprising six sequential steps: manual familiarization, coding, theme generation, theme review, theme definition and labelling, and, ultimately, theme interpretation.

As an initial phase of this undertaking, the researchers compiled a transcript capturing the spoken data, subsequently deriving an inventory of preliminary codes through the identification of salient information contained within the respondents' statements. During the third stage of the thematic analysis, the investigators refocused their examination from a broader thematic perspective and conducted another sorting of themes by revisiting the individual codes. During the review of themes phase, the researchers read and documented all the compiled excerpts pertaining to each theme. Following these analytical steps, the process advanced towards refining the themes and defining their final appellations by considering the criteria of conciseness and the extent to which the name instantaneously communicates the essence of the theme to the reader. Lastly, the study furnishes an exhaustive analysis of the causal factors contributing to the perception of stress during the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka.

Drawing upon the thematic analysis, a total of four overarching themes and ten subordinate themes were discerned as the causes underlying the perception of stress among young adults amidst the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka. The findings arising from the qualitative analysis pertaining to the causes of perceived stress encompassed four themes, namely economic crisis, inflation, household expenditure, and financial difficulties. Within the confines of these four themes, ten subordinate themes were identified, pertaining to the causes of perceived stress during the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka.

Economic Crisis

- Loss of hope

The discussion through responses from young adults in Sri Lanka highlights the theme of loss of hope caused by the ongoing crisis in the country. The inability to pursue their dreams and plans due to this recent period has left many feeling hopeless and helpless. Even those with stable jobs and salaries feel that their expectations for the future have been shattered. One of the participants who is currently working as an account manager in a leading telecommunications company, stated:

"Yeah, sometimes, I was a heavy effort to fulfill my basic need during this period. This inflation occurred with this economic crisis. During this period, I had more situations that thought twice to fulfill my basic needs."

- Power failures

Based on the statements of participants provided, it seems that power failures have had a significant impact on the daily lives of these respondents. The inability to charge electronic devices such as phones and laptops has resulted in difficulties with work, attending online lectures, and accessing online materials. One of the participants explained:

"These power failures badly affected my life. For instance, I often use my router for Wi-Fi, but I couldn't attend lectures during this period due to power failures. And also, I couldn't use my laptop in some situations that I want such as doing assessments, attending lectures, searching assessment-related materials, etc."

- Decreasing profits

Some statements are related to the impact of the current economic crisis on the profitability of businesses. Some participants mention that their firms have shown lower profits compared to the past, and they attribute this to the low supply of essential goods and services which has made it difficult to run their businesses. One of the participant who is running a business related to a distribution agency, noted:

"Due to the decrease in my business profits and the increase in expenses of my business during the crisis, it became very difficult to carry on my business. With the

payment of these responsibilities, the profit decreased very much. I have faced even losses."

Fuel issues

In the resulting lack of fuel, some statements describe the impact of the current economic crisis on various aspects of daily life, such as socializing, work, and education. Explanations of participants mention that they were not able to spend more time with friends due to the crisis, while other respondents describe how the lack of transportation facilities caused difficulties in their work or academic activities. One of the participants, who often goes out for academic and profession related tasks, responded:

"A lot of time was wasted due to transportation problems in going to and from work. In the cases where I had to go away from the workplace for academic work, there were travel difficulties."

Inflation

- Food inflation

The responses from the interviews highlight the impact of food inflation on people's eating habits and lifestyles. Some participants expressed the limitation in their food choices, with some participants resorting to growing their vegetables and fruits. One of the participants stated:

"Due to food inflation, we have already grown vegetables and fruits in our garden on a small scale."

The responses highlight the challenge of maintaining a decent lifestyle due to the increase in the cost of essentials such as food, milk powder, and gas. One of the participants who is living in a boarding house emphasized:

"On the other hand, we used to eat outside shops but now we cook and eat in the boarding house."

- Inflation in transportation

Based on the statements provided, it can be inferred that the cost of transportation is a significant concern for the respondents, and it has affected their ability to attend physical gatherings on campus. One of the participants who is a student in a non-state university, mentioned:

"When my group members and I discuss group-based assignments, we usually use the Zoom platform instead of physical gatherings on campus because it is a cost-saving method, and in the current period in the country, the traveling cost is high."

Household Expenditure

- Food issues

Based on the statements through the discussion, it can be concluded that the respondents are experiencing financial difficulties and are struggling to afford basic necessities such as food. One of the participants who depends on his parents' monthly salary, said:

"In this period, as a family, we focused on the foods that were affordable to us based on my parents' monthly salary. Actually, we are living with difficulty with my parents' small pension, because my parents are retired. therefore, we cannot live like others who are employed."

- Changes in lifestyle

After analyzing the responses provided by the respondents, it can be inferred that the current crisis situation has had a profound impact on their lifestyle and financial behavior. The statements of respondents have displayed a conscious effort towards practicing frugality in their daily activities, which is evident from their reduced usage of electricity and water, limited shopping, and the management of their monthly salaries to pay bills and sustain their lifestyles. One of the participants who is focusing on bill payments stated:

"I managed my monthly salary not only for food but also for paying monthly bills which were, router bill, phone bill, etc."

Financial Difficulties

- Minimizing expenditure

Based on the responses provided, it is clear that the financial difficulties during the period have had a significant impact on people's spending habits and financial management. Many statements of respondents reported cutting back on non-essential expenses and limiting their spending to only the necessities. One of the participants reported:

"Normally, I am a funny and happy guy who is willing to eat and travel with my friends. But I was very sensitive and cared about my money management in this situation."

- Finding extra sources of income

The statements of the respondents demonstrate that some individuals have taken proactive steps such as extra income ways to manage their finances during the cent economic crisis in the country. Despite facing financial challenges, these individuals have sought out ways to increase their income and improve their financial literacy. One of the participant who is still a university student, noted:

"I am still a student, so I do not have a high income. However, I started a tuition class for managing my finances during this troublous situation."

Stress Management Strategies and Coping Mechanisms through Word Cloud Analysis

Figure 8: Word cloud analysis for stress management strategies and coping mechanisms
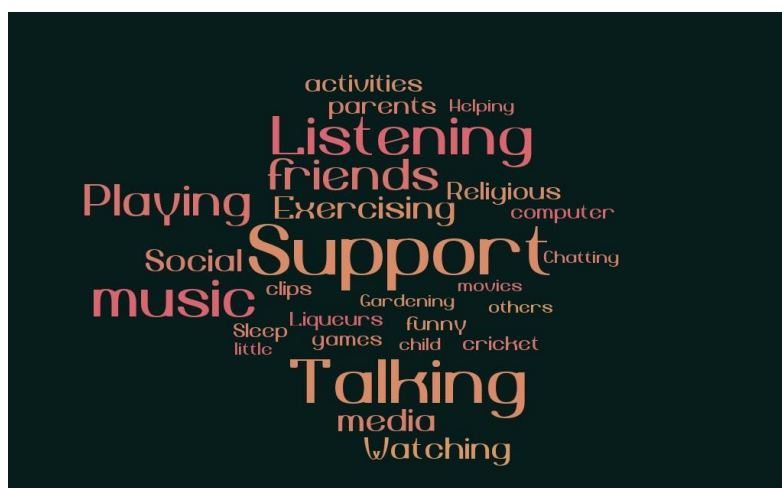
Source: Authors' Illustration based on analysis

According to Figure 8, the most frequently used strategy, adopted by young adults was "Support". In addition to the "Support" stress management strategy, there were some stress management strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by young adults in Sri Lanka which were, listening to music, talking with friends, social media, exercising, talking with parents, religious activities, watching funny clips, sleep, playing cricket, playing computer games, watching movies, chatting, playing with little child, liqueurs, gardening and helping others.

CONCLUSIONS

The study reveals significant variations in stress levels among provinces in Sri Lanka, with the Western province consistently reporting the highest prevalence of high stress. Both males and females generally experience moderate stress levels, although gender differences exist in the proportions of experiencing high and low stress. Marital status influences stress levels, with unmarried individuals experiencing higher stress overall. Higher educational attainment correlates with elevated levels of moderate stress. Various employment categories, including permanent employees in the private sector, self-employed individuals, and unemployed individuals comparatively experience high stress. Students exhibit the highest overall stress levels. Lower-income young adults face higher stress compared to their higher-income counterparts, particularly those earning between Rs. 0 to Rs. 50,000. State university students experience higher stress during economic and political crises compared to non-state university students.

The economic crisis and inflation have profoundly impacted individuals, leading to perceived stress and necessitating changes in plans, aspirations, and basic needs. Important events have been postponed, goals altered, and financial difficulties have become common. Frequent power cuts have disrupted work, education, and online activities. Businesses have suffered reduced profits due to low supply and increased expenses, resulting in losses. Limited fuel availability has further hindered daily life, affecting commuting and attending classes. Food inflation has disrupted eating patterns and promoted home gardening. Higher transportation costs have prompted cost-saving measures like online discussions and reduced travel. Financial difficulties have led to prioritizing necessities, limited expenses, and exploring additional income sources. The crisis has reshaped lifestyles, requiring adjustments and presenting challenges for young adults in Sri Lanka.

If moving to the main findings related to stress management strategies and coping mechanisms adopted by young adults during this recent economic and political crisis in Sri Lanka, family members, friends, and spouses provided crucial emotional and practical support to the respondents in various aspects of their lives.

This study aimed to address the research gap regarding perceived stress during the recent economic collapse in Sri Lanka, focusing on the young population. It employed a mixed methods approach, utilizing both quantitative and qualitative data analysis and collection methods. Crowd-sourcing and simple random sampling, and snowball sampling techniques were used. The main findings revealed significant provincial variations in stress levels, with the Western province reporting the highest prevalence of high stress. Gender differences were observed, with males and females generally experiencing moderate stress. Unmarried individuals exhibited higher overall stress levels, while higher education correlated with elevated levels of moderate stress. Various employment categories showed comparatively high stress and lower-income young adults faced heightened stress. State university students experienced increased stress during crises. Economic crisis and inflation can be identified as the main factors among causes of perceived stress. Support from family, friends, and spouses played a crucial role in stress management.

The government can support young entrepreneurs by providing credit schemes, tax concessions, and access to affordable resources, ensuring business sustainability and contributing to economic growth. To address food inflation, collaboration with universities and educational institutions can offer reasonably priced nutritious meals in canteens or public markets, enabling young adults to access nourishing food while pursuing education. Additionally, prioritizing the distribution of essential goods like stationery and electronic equipment minimizes inflation's impact on their educational pursuits. Supporting middle-class young adults in higher education can involve measures like low-cost meals and distance learning options, reducing financial burdens and facilitating continued studies.

For stress management during crises, engaging in creative activities such as painting, drawing, or writing provides a therapeutic outlet for processing emotions and self-expression. Outdoor activities like hiking, biking, or sports offer physical benefits akin to formal exercise. Mindfulness and meditation practices like mindfulness meditation or loving-kindness meditation aid stress reduction, self-awareness, and relaxation. Practicing self-care activities such as adequate sleep, balanced meals, and relaxation techniques promote both physical and mental well-being during stressful periods.

The concept of presided stress is a cognitively complex and dynamic theme. As a result, the perception of Economic crisis uptake can change over time. But due to the cross-sectional setting of this study, the dynamic trends of the economic crisis cannot be demonstrated. Also, in our research researchers could not collect data equally from every province and this study could not get proper results from the collected data, and the sample size was small. And if this economic crisis decreases slowly, stress management strategies and coping mechanisms may decrease, despite its limitations, this study contributes significantly to assessing presided stress among a large and diverse sample of young adults in Sri Lanka.

This section proposes several future research directions to explore the perception of stress and its causes among young adults during political and economic crises in Sri Lanka. It is recommended to identify unique concerns specific to Sri Lanka that have not been previously studied. To enhance generalizability, the sample size should be increased by including participants from all age groups and regions, focusing on the areas most affected by the economic crisis.

Additionally, a fully quantitative research design using advanced analysis techniques and software can provide a comprehensive understanding of the factors influencing perceived stress, considering Sri Lankan demographic variables. Alternatively, a qualitative approach employing established data analysis methods can shed light on individual stress experiences and coping mechanisms. This approach should incorporate locally recognized stress

management strategies to enrich our understanding of coping during economic and political crises.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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