

An Overview of Stress Among Working Students: A Qualitative Study

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Abstract

Purpose: This study examined how working students experience and interpret stress while simultaneously managing their academic and occupational responsibilities. It identifies stress frequency and intensity, major stressors, and physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress.

Research Methodology: A qualitative descriptive phenomenological design was used. Three undergraduate students who were both studying and working were selected through purposive sampling. Data were collected through semi-structured in-depth interviews and analyzed using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological method to identify meaning units and synthesize the participants' lived experiences.

Results: The participants experienced frequent stress at varying intensities. Major stressors included difficulties in managing time and energy, role conflicts, and concerns about declining academic and work performance. Stress manifests as fatigue, sleep disturbances, anxiety, emotional sensitivity, overthinking, and reduced concentration.

Conclusions: Working students experience multidimensional stress arising from competing academic and occupational demands. Effective time management, adaptive coping strategies, and institutional support are important for maintaining psychological well-being and academic performance among medical students.

Limitations: The study involved only three participants from one faculty at a single university, which limited the transferability of the findings.

Contributions: This study enriches the student mental health literature by providing a phenomenological understanding of working students' stress experiences and offering practical implications for counseling services, student support programs, and inclusive academic policies.

Keywords: *Academic Work Conflict, Dual Roles, Phenomenology, Stress, Working Students*

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1. Introduction

The phenomenon of university students simultaneously undertaking dual roles as learners and employees has become increasingly common in Indonesia higher education. Many students work

during the day while attending classes and completing their academic responsibilities in the evening. While combining study and employment may provide financial support and valuable work experience, it also presents considerable psychological challenges for students. [Barbayannis, Bandari, Zheng, Baquerizo, Pecor, and Ming \(2022\)](#), surveying more than 800 college students, emphasized that academic stress arises from the cumulative pressure of heavy coursework, competitive academic environments, and mounting expectations occurring simultaneously. This arrangement makes stress management more challenging for students and disproportionately impacts some student groups more than others. Students who balance these dual roles frequently experience difficulty concentrating, heightened emotional responses, and feelings of inadequacy in meeting academic and occupational demands. Consequently, the issue extends beyond individual experiences and reflects a broader challenge encountered by working students in higher education institutions in Indonesia.

Statistics Indonesia, as cited by [Thorifa and Mulyaningsih \(2025\)](#), reported that part-time work is becoming more prevalent among Indonesian university students. Financial limitations and the desire to gain professional experience during higher education are among the primary motivations for students seeking employment. However, fulfilling the responsibilities of both work and study simultaneously places students at a greater risk of experiencing psychological distress ([Thorifa & Mulyaningsih, 2025](#)). [El and Widiasih \(2024\)](#) further emphasized that difficulties in balancing work and academic responsibilities constitute a primary threat to the psychological well-being of working students.

Stress among working students has become an increasingly important issue because prolonged psychological distress may negatively influence academic performance, work productivity, and overall psychological wellbeing. Despite the growing attention to this topic, relatively few qualitative studies have explored the lived experiences of students who combine work and study, particularly the multidimensional nature of the stress they experience. Most previous studies have primarily focused on academic stress or coping mechanisms using quantitative approaches, which provide valuable information about stress levels and associated factors but offer more limited insight into how working students personally experience, interpret, and manage stress in their daily lives ([Yoevita, & Widjajanti, 2022](#); [Dion, Emilisa, & Citra, 2022](#))).

This gap is particularly significant given that stress is not determined solely by the existence of external demands. From a transactional perspective, stress is also influenced by individuals' appraisal of those demands in relation to their perceived coping resources ([Lazarus & Folkman, 1984](#)). Thus, students facing similar academic and occupational demands may experience and respond to stress differently, depending on how they perceive their available resources and ability to manage those demands. Therefore, a qualitative phenomenological approach is appropriate for examining these subjective experiences and the meanings students attach to them.

By focusing on participants' lived experiences, phenomenological inquiry can complement existing quantitative findings by revealing how academic and occupational demands are experienced simultaneously, how students perceive competing responsibilities, and how stress manifests across physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions. This perspective provides a more in-depth understanding of stress as a multidimensional lived experience rather than merely a measurable psychological condition ([Andini, 2024](#); [Firmansyah, Nainggolan, & Haque, 2024](#); [Almaida, & Purnomo, 2021](#)).

Therefore, the distinct contribution of this study is its phenomenological exploration of how working students experience and make sense of stress while navigating their dual academic and occupational roles. This study offers a comprehensive exploration of stress among working students by examining their stress levels, primary sources of stress, and physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress. It is anticipated that the results will increase our understanding of student mental health and provide higher education institutions with useful information for creating more encouraging learning environments and services for working students.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Theoretical Perspective on Stress

Working students experience unique psychological challenges because they are required to simultaneously fulfill both academic and occupational responsibilities. [Lazarus and Folkman \(1984\)](#) conceptualized stress as arising when an individual cognitively evaluates environmental demands as exceeding the coping resources available to them. Within this transactional perspective, stress is not solely produced by external demands. Rather, it emerges through the relationship between perceived demands and individuals' judgments of whether available resources are adequate to manage those demands.

This theoretical perspective is particularly relevant for working students because they must continuously evaluate competing demands from two life domains. Academic assignments, examinations, attendance requirements, and thesis completion may compete with work schedules, productivity targets, and occupational responsibilities. When these demands are perceived as exceeding the available time, energy, or coping resources, the situation may be appraised as stressful. Conversely, personal and contextual resources, such as resilience, coping strategies, and institutional support, may influence how students respond to these demands.

2.2 Sources of Stress and Role Conflict

Within the context of working students, stress originates from multiple overlapping sources. Academic responsibilities include attending lectures, completing assignments, preparing for examinations, and writing undergraduate theses, whereas occupational demands involve achieving work targets, maintaining productivity, and adapting to extended working hours ([Adelia, Saputra, & Kusumawat, 2025](#); [Chaidar, Silvia, & Jatnika, 2023](#)). Simultaneously managing these responsibilities often creates role conflict, particularly when academic and work obligations occur simultaneously.

From a transactional perspective, the accumulation of demands becomes particularly relevant when students perceive that their available resources are insufficient to meet both sets of responsibilities. [Sutisna and Merida \(2025\)](#) found that examination pressure and ineffective time management were the primary contributors to academic stress among working students. [Putri, Putri, and Nova \(2025\)](#) reported that poor time management, physical fatigue, and declining learning concentration are common manifestations of stress.

[Versteeg and Kappe \(2021\)](#) found, among more than 2,400 higher education students, that resilience and institutional support functioned as serial protective factors against academic stress and depression. These findings complement Lazarus and Folkman's transactional perspective by demonstrating that stress experiences are influenced not only by demands but also by the resources available to individuals. Resilience may strengthen students' capacity to respond to demanding situations, whereas institutional support may provide additional external resources for managing academic pressure.

2.3 Psychological Consequences of Dual-Role Demands

Prolonged exposure to role conflict may also result in more severe psychological consequences for employees. [Zul, Husin, and Mu \(2025\)](#) demonstrated that persistent role conflict increases the likelihood of academic burnout when students lack effective adjustment strategies. [Berdida and Grande \(2023\)](#) found that resilience serves as a mediating factor linking academic stress and quality of life among university students experiencing significant academic pressure. Taken together, these findings suggest that prolonged demands may become psychologically burdensome when individuals lack the resources to adapt to them.

[Wang and Li \(2026\)](#) further demonstrated, in a two-wave study of music students juggling coursework with nighttime employment, that work-school conflict undermines student engagement by reducing psychological need satisfaction while increasing need frustration and academic burnout. [Drăghici and Cazan \(2022\)](#) found that academic burnout outweighed work-related burnout among employed university students, with test anxiety contributing to poorer academic adjustment.

[Khadijah, Dhanty, Sambas, and Salianto \(2024\)](#) found that academic stress contributes to declining academic achievement and delays in completing studies. [Rahmah and Khoirunnisa \(2023\)](#) reported that family pressure, excessive worry, ineffective time management, and accumulated physical and mental fatigue intensified the psychological burden experienced by working students.

These findings indicate that stress among working students extends beyond temporary emotional discontent. When academic and occupational demands persist without sufficient recovery or coping resources, stress may interfere with academic functioning, occupational performance and psychological well-being.

2.4 Multidimensional Manifestations of Stress

Beyond its psychological impact, stress can manifest physically, emotionally, and cognitively. Common physical symptoms include fatigue and sleep disturbances, whereas emotional manifestations involve anxiety, irritability, and emotional instability. Cognitive responses often include excessive worry, reduced concentration, and difficulty in making decisions ([Lelek-Kratiuk & Szczygieł, 2022](#); [Putri et al., 2025](#)).

These manifestations can also be understood through the transactional model because cognitive appraisal and emotional responses occur alongside physiological and behavioral responses to perceived demands. Consequently, examining only one dimension of stress may provide an incomplete understanding of how working students experience this phenomenon. Therefore, a multidimensional examination is necessary to capture how stress is experienced across different aspects of daily functioning ([Ulfa, Agustiani, Qodariah, & Jatnika, 2023](#)).

2.5 Coping and Protective Resources

The availability of coping resources is another important component in understanding stress among working students. [Waterhouse and Samra \(2026\)](#), in a scoping review synthesizing 165 international studies, documented that students under pressure rely on two broad forms of coping: problem-focused strategies, which seek to address the source of stress, and emotion-focused strategies, which aim to regulate emotional reactions. This distinction is consistent with the transactional theory of stress developed by Lazarus and Folkman, in which coping is understood as the cognitive and behavioral efforts made by individuals to manage demands that are perceived as stressful.

[Herlambang and Arianti \(2024\)](#), through a qualitative case study of civil servants pursuing further education while working, found that individuals adopted different coping strategies depending on their economic circumstances and social environments. This finding reinforces the importance of examining coping within the context of individuals' lived experiences because the same stressor may be appraised and managed differently depending on available personal and environmental resources.

2.6 Research Gap and Phenomenological Perspective

Although previous studies have identified variables related to stress, academic burnout, and coping in working students ([El Hamra & Widiastih, 2024](#); [Khadijah et al., 2024](#); [Putri et al., 2025](#); [Sutisna & Merida, 2025](#)), much of the existing evidence has relied on quantitative approaches that examine the levels, relationships, predictors, or outcomes of stress. Such approaches are valuable for identifying patterns across populations, but they provide limited insight into the subjective meanings of stress and how students experience competing academic and occupational demands in their everyday lives.

Therefore, the gap is not simply the absence of research on working students' stress but the limited qualitative understanding of how stress is experienced, interpreted, and managed from the students' own perspectives. A phenomenological approach is appropriate because it focuses on participants' lived experiences and seeks to identify the essential meanings underlying those experiences. This approach allowed the present study to complement existing quantitative evidence by examining stress as a multidimensional experience embedded within students' daily academic and occupational realities.

Accordingly, the present research extends the existing literature by providing an in-depth phenomenological description of stress experiences among working students, particularly regarding the interaction between academic and occupational demands, the perceived sources of stress, and its physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations. In response to the identified research gap, this study aims to: (1) explore the stress experiences of working students; (2) identify the primary sources of stress associated with balancing academic and occupational responsibilities; and (3) examine the physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress experienced while simultaneously fulfilling the roles of student and employee.

3. Research Methodology

A qualitative approach with a descriptive phenomenological design was used to investigate the lived experiences and subjective meanings of stress among working students. A phenomenological approach was considered appropriate because it provides a means of examining how individuals perceive, experience, and interpret a phenomenon based on their own perspectives ([Nasir, Nurjana, Shah, Sirodj, & Afgani, 2023](#)). Descriptive phenomenology emphasizes the description of lived experiences and the identification of the essential meanings embedded within them ([Giorgi, 1997](#); [Englander, & Morley, 2023](#)). The phenomenological attitude was maintained across the different stages of the study to reduce the potential impact of the researcher's preconceptions when examining participants' experiences ([Dragan, & Sondaité, 2023](#); [Sugiyono, 2022](#)). Therefore, this design was adopted to obtain a deeper understanding of how working students experience stress while simultaneously fulfilling their academic and occupational roles.

3.1 Participants

The participants were three undergraduate students who were simultaneously enrolled in university and employed during the study period. Recruitment was conducted through purposive sampling, as the study required participants with direct experience of the phenomenon being studied. This sampling approach allows qualitative researchers to identify individuals capable of providing information that is relevant and sufficiently rich to address the research objectives ([Ahmad & Wilkins, 2025](#)).

To be eligible for participation, individuals had to fulfill the following criteria: (1) actively registered as undergraduate students; (2) worked either part-time or full-time for at least six months; (3) simultaneously perform academic and occupational roles; and (4) voluntarily agree to participate in the research after providing informed consent.

Three participants were considered adequate for the descriptive phenomenological focus of this study because the purpose was to obtain in-depth and detailed accounts of lived experiences rather than achieve a numerical representation of the wider population. Participant adequacy was assessed by considering the depth, richness, and relevance of interview data in relation to research objectives. Data collection was conducted iteratively, with subsequent interviews used to further clarify and explore experiences related to stress, competing academic and occupational demands, time and energy management, and the physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress. Data collection was concluded when the available accounts provided sufficient depth and relevance to address the research objectives and supported the development of a shared description of the phenomenon.

Because the study prioritized depth of experience rather than statistical generalization, the findings are intended to provide a contextual and in-depth description of the phenomenon rather than to represent all working students.

3.2 Data Collection

Semi-structured, in-depth interviews were used as the primary method of data collection. The interview guide was formulated according to the research objectives and conceptual focus of the study while retaining sufficient flexibility to ask additional questions that could further clarify participants' responses in greater depth. The interview questions focused on the participants' experiences of stress, situations that triggered or intensified stress, perceived demands of academic and occupational roles, and physical, emotional, and cognitive responses to stress.

Each participant was interviewed in two to three sessions, and each interview lasted approximately 30-60 minutes. The interviews were conducted in person in a setting mutually selected by the researcher and each participant, with consideration given to ensuring a comfortable and confidential environment. After obtaining permission from the participants, the interviews were audio-recorded, and field notes were used to document relevant contextual observations and nonverbal behaviors.

Non-participant observation was also incorporated to provide contextual information that could support the interpretation of the participants' accounts. The observations were not treated as a separate primary source of phenomenological data but were used to enrich the contextual understanding of the participants' experiences.

3.3 Data Analysis

The interview material was examined using Giorgi's descriptive phenomenological approach ([Giorgi, 1997](#); [Englander & Morley, 2023](#)). The analysis was conducted in five systematic stages. First, the researcher read each interview transcript repeatedly to obtain a holistic understanding of each participant's experience. Second, a phenomenological attitude was adopted to bracket, as far as possible, the researcher's preconceptions and assumptions regarding the phenomenon. Third, meaning units relevant to the phenomenon under investigation were identified from transcripts. Fourth, participants' everyday descriptions contained within the meaning units were transformed into psychologically meaningful expressions while maintaining their essential meanings. Finally, the transformed meaning units were synthesized into a consistent general structure describing the essential features of the participants' shared experience of stress.

The analysis was conducted iteratively for all participants. Individual participant descriptions were first developed before the researcher compared the transformed meaning units across the cases to identify common structures and meaningful variations. This process enabled the analysis to retain individual experiences while identifying the essential structure of stress experienced by working students.

3.4 Trustworthiness and Ethical Considerations

Several procedures were implemented to enhance the trustworthiness of the research findings. Throughout the study, the researcher maintained comprehensive field records and documented the steps taken during the analytical process throughout the stages of data collection and analysis. Interview recordings were transcribed accurately, and the participants' accounts were reviewed in relation to the original interview recordings to maintain accuracy. Pseudonyms were used in the transcripts and research reports to protect the participants' identities.

Before data collection, the participants received information regarding the purpose, procedures, possible benefits and potential risks, confidentiality, and their right to withdraw. Participation was entirely voluntary, and all participants provided informed consent prior to the interview. Throughout the research process, this study followed the principles of voluntary participation, confidentiality, anonymity, and respect for the rights of the participants.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Results

Three undergraduate students participated in this study, all of whom balanced their academic studies with employment. Information was obtained through in-depth, semi-structured interviews that addressed three major aspects: (1) frequency and intensity of stress, (2) primary sources of stress, and (3) physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress. The findings for each participant are presented in Tables 1–3.

As shown in Table 1, Participant 1 experienced stress almost every day, particularly when academic deadlines coincided with their work demands. The primary sources of stress included time management difficulties, simultaneous academic and work responsibilities, and concerns regarding declining

performance. The participants also reported physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress.

Table 1. Interview Results of Participant 1

Aspect	Findings
Frequency and Intensity of Stress	Almost every day, increased when academic deadlines coincided with work demands.
Primary Sources of Stress	Time management difficulties, simultaneous academic and work demands, and concerns regarding declining performance.
Stress Manifestations	Physical symptoms included fatigue, headaches, and sleep disturbances. Emotional: anxiety, emotional sensitivity, and exhaustion. Cognitive: overthinking and difficulty in concentrating.

As shown in Table 2, Participant 2 experienced frequent stress that fluctuated depending on the workload, with stress peaking when multiple demands accumulated simultaneously. The primary sources of stress included conflicting work and class schedules, heavy dual-role demands, and limited time for relaxation. The participants also reported physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress.

Table 2. Interview Results of Participant 2

Aspect	Findings
Frequency and Intensity of Stress	Stress was quite frequent and fluctuated depending on workload, with stress peaking when multiple demands accumulated simultaneously.
Primary Sources of Stress	Conflicting work and class schedules, heavy dual-role demands, and limited time for rest.
Stress Manifestations	Physical: fatigue, headaches, sleep disturbances, and reduced physical endurance. Emotional: emotional sensitivity, irritability, and anxiety. Cognitive: overthinking, difficulty concentrating, and divided attention.

As shown in Table 3, Participant 3 experienced stress several times each week, with stress intensifying during periods of overlapping academic and work deadlines. The primary sources of stress included limited time and energy management, post-work fatigue, concerns regarding declining performance, and insufficient personal recovery time. The participants also reported physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations of stress.

Table 3. Interview Results of Participant 3

Aspect	Findings
Frequency and Intensity of Stress	Fairly frequent: several times each week, with stress intensifying during overlapping academic and work deadlines.
Primary Sources of Stress	Limited time and energy management, post-work fatigue, concerns about declining performance, and insufficient personal recovery time were also reported.
Stress Manifestations	Physical: fatigue, muscle pain, headache, sleep disturbances, and increased appetite. Emotional: anxiety, emotional sensitivity, and excessive worry. Cognitive: overthinking, difficulty concentrating, forgetfulness, and temporary thoughts of giving up.

4.2 Discussions

4.2.1 Stress Levels Among Working Students

The findings revealed that all participants frequently experienced psychological stress, ranging from several times per week to almost every day. Stress intensity fluctuated according to the interaction

between academic deadlines and occupational responsibilities, becoming most severe when both demands occurred concurrently. From a phenomenological perspective, the findings suggest that the participants did not experience stress as a single or constant state. Instead, stress emerged dynamically as participants encountered situations in which academic and occupational demands competed for the same limited resources, particularly time, energy, attention, and rest opportunities. Therefore, the meaning of stress was closely connected to the participants' ongoing efforts to maintain their responsibilities in both domains.

These findings are consistent with those of [Sutisna and Merida \(2025\)](#), who found that 68% of students who worked while studying experienced moderate levels of academic stress, while 30% experienced high levels of stress. Their findings also showed that examination-related stress was the most prominent contributing factor, followed by stress related to group learning and time management. The present findings extend this quantitative perspective by illustrating how stress is experienced in everyday situations, particularly when multiple academic and occupational responsibilities accumulate simultaneously.

The participants' experiences also indicate that the central challenge was not simply the presence of academic or occupational demands but the difficulty of managing both demands simultaneously. In this sense, stress can be understood through [Lazarus and Folkman \(1984\)](#) transactional perspective: demands become psychologically stressful when participants perceive that their available time, energy, and coping resources are insufficient to meet competing responsibilities. Consequently, prolonged exposure to dual-role demands may contribute to psychological strain when adequate support and coping strategies are unavailable.

4.2.2 Primary Sources of Stress

Cross-case analysis identified three consistent sources of stress: difficulties in managing time and energy, simultaneous academic and occupational demands, and concerns regarding declining performance in both domains. Time management was reported to be the most common difficulty. Participants consistently described the available time as insufficient to complete academic tasks, work responsibilities, and personal activities. These findings support [Virgiana, Melani, & Aini \(2024\)](#), who identified time management as a significant challenge for part-time students in maintaining their academic responsibilities while working.

Phenomenologically, the participants' descriptions indicate that limited time was experienced not merely as a scheduling problem but as a condition that restricted their opportunities to rest, recover, and attend to personal needs. Thus, the experience of having "insufficient time" reflects a broader perception of limited personal resources for managing competing demands. Unlike the other participants, the third participant emphasized limited energy rather than limited time as a central issue. Physical and mental exhaustion accumulated after work reduced the capacity to complete academic responsibilities effectively. This finding is consistent with [Hidayati & Basyari \(2025\)](#), who found a significant association between mental workload and work-related stress among working students.

The difference between limited time and limited energy also demonstrates that similar dual-role demands may be experienced differently by individuals in different contexts. While the external demands may be comparable, participants' subjective experiences were shaped by the resources they perceived as available to them. This variation is consistent with the transactional perspective of stress, which emphasizes individual appraisal rather than assuming that the same demand produces an identical psychological response in every individual. Another significant stressor was concerns about declining performance in both academic and occupational settings. Participants feared that fulfilling one role would reduce their ability to perform adequately in the other. This concern is consistent with [Nirmalasari & Minai \(2023\)](#), who reported an inverse association between role conflict and academic and work performance among university students who combined study and employment.

From the participants' perspectives, the pressure to maintain adequate performance in both domains created an ongoing sense of responsibility and concern. Therefore, the experience of stress involved

not only the immediate demands of completing tasks but also the anticipation of possible negative consequences if one role received insufficient attention.

4.2.3 Physical, Emotional, and Cognitive Stress Responses

The stress experienced by the participants manifested simultaneously across the physical, emotional, and cognitive dimensions.

Physically, the participants most frequently reported chronic fatigue, headaches, sleep disturbances, and reduced physical endurance. One participant reported increased appetite as a physiological response to stress, illustrating individual differences in stress reactions. These physical experiences indicate that the participants' stress was embodied in their everyday functioning. Fatigue and sleep disturbances were not experienced as separate symptoms but were closely connected to the demands of working, studying, and having insufficient opportunities for recovery.

Anxiety, emotional sensitivity, irritability, and emotional exhaustion were consistently reported. These emotional responses appear to result from prolonged exposure to cumulative academic and occupational stress. From a phenomenological perspective, these emotional responses reflect how the participants experienced the pressure of maintaining both roles over time. Anxiety was particularly connected to uncertainty regarding responsibilities and performance, whereas emotional sensitivity and irritability appeared in situations where accumulated demands became difficult to manage.

Cognitively, all participants described persistent overthinking, impaired concentration, and divided attention between their academic and occupational responsibilities. One participant also experienced short-term memory difficulties that interfered with their learning effectiveness. The cognitive experiences further demonstrated that stress affected participants' ability to direct attention toward a single responsibility. Their descriptions suggest that academic and occupational concerns continued to compete for attention, resulting in overthinking, divided attention, and difficulty in concentrating.

Taken together, the physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations indicate that the participants experienced stress as an interconnected and multidimensional phenomenon. Rather than appearing as isolated symptoms, these experiences formed part of a broader process in which competing demands, perceived limitations in resources, emotional responses, and cognitive difficulties interacted with one another.

5. Conclusions

5.1 Conclusion

This study examined the stress experiences of working students by focusing on their stress levels, major sources of stress, and physical, emotional, and cognitive manifestations. The findings indicate that working students commonly experience varying levels of stress, particularly when academic and occupational demands arise simultaneously. Three primary sources of stress emerged from the findings: challenges in managing time and energy, simultaneous academic and occupational responsibilities, and concerns regarding reduced performance in both areas. Stress manifests through physical, emotional, and cognitive responses, including fatigue, sleep disturbances, anxiety, emotional sensitivity, overthinking, and difficulty concentrating.

From a theoretical perspective, stress results from the interaction between perceived demands and the coping resources available to an individual. The phenomenological findings also indicate that stress among working students represents a continuous process of managing competing responsibilities rather than a stable psychological state. Overall, this study contributes to the existing literature by complementing quantitative evidence with an in-depth exploration of the lived experiences of stress among students who concurrently fulfill academic and professional roles. The findings further emphasize the importance of effective time and energy management, adaptive coping strategies, and institutional support in helping working students manage the demands associated with multiple roles.

5.2 Research Limitations

Several limitations of the present study should be acknowledged when interpreting the findings. First, three participants were included in the study, which is appropriate for a depth-oriented descriptive phenomenological inquiry but may constrain the extent to which these findings can be transferred to a wider group of working students. Second, the participants were recruited from a single higher education setting; therefore, the results may not completely represent how working students experience stress across different academic disciplines or institutional contexts. Finally, the study relied primarily on qualitative interview data, making the findings dependent on the participants' subjective experiences and self-reported perceptions. Future qualitative studies may strengthen the transferability of findings by including participants with greater variations in academic disciplines, employment characteristics, and institutional contexts.

5.3 Suggestions and Directions for Future Research

In light of the findings of this study, working students are encouraged to develop effective time and energy management skills and adopt adaptive coping strategies to achieve a healthy balance between their academic and occupational obligations. Higher education institutions are encouraged to establish more flexible and inclusive academic policies while strengthening accessible psychological counselling and student support services that address the specific needs of working students.

Future research should include participants from a more diverse range of universities to enhance the findings' transferability. Further qualitative studies should explore differences in stress experiences across employment types, academic disciplines, and institutional contexts. Researchers may also employ mixed methods or quantitative approaches to complement qualitative findings and examine additional factors such as coping strategies, resilience, social support, work engagement, academic burnout, and psychological well-being. Longitudinal studies may also provide a deeper understanding of how stress evolves throughout students' academic and professional experiences.

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Author Contributions

IH, ACJ, and ANA conceptualized the study, conducted the investigation, prepared the initial manuscript, created the visualizations, and secured funding. IH oversaw the project administration, SMN supervised the research process, and was responsible for data curation, formal analysis, and validation. SMN also contributed to the review and editing of the manuscript. All authors reviewed and approved the final manuscript.

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