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Internship stress in students

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Abstract

Internships are a crucial stepping stone in professional development, but they often expose interns to significant stress. This study examines stressors in online and offline internship settings, drawing on survey data from 200 participants. Key findings reveal that tight deadlines, heavy workloads, and financial challenges are the most common stressors, with offline interns additionally burdened by travel-related issues. Stress manifests in emotional, behavioral, and physical ways, such as reduced productivity and mood swings. The study emphasizes the need for improved support systems to mitigate these stressors and enhance the internship experience, fostering both intern well-being and career success.

Keywords: Internship stress, online internships, offline internships, stressors

Introduction

Stress is a widespread concern that impacts individuals across various professional environments, often leading to negative effects on both mental and physical health. Interns, who occupy a unique position as learners and contributors within workplaces, are particularly vulnerable to stress due to the dual demands of acquiring new skills and meeting professional expectations. As internships play a critical role in career development, understanding and addressing the factors contributing to intern stress is essential for ensuring their well-being and productivity.

Despite the increasing importance of internships, limited research has specifically focused on the stress experienced by interns, particularly in comparing in-office and remote internship setups. Existing studies predominantly center on employees in general, leaving the unique challenges faced by interns underexplored. Factors such as workload, financial challenges, interpersonal relationships, and the specific conditions of internship environments (e.g., online versus offline) can significantly influence stress levels, yet these remain inadequately studied.

This research aims to bridge this gap by examining the primary stressors encountered by interns and comparing their manifestations and impacts in online and offline settings. By analyzing these stressors and their effects, the study seeks to provide actionable insights for developing more supportive systems and strategies, ultimately enhancing the overall internship experience and contributing to interns' personal and professional growth.

Background and Motivation

Stress is a common issue affecting individuals in a variety of professional contexts, with notable impacts on both physical and mental health. Interns, who must juggle the demands of learning and working simultaneously, are particularly vulnerable to stress. Despite growing recognition of this problem, there is limited research specifically examining the effects of stress on interns, especially when comparing in-office and remote internships. Most studies focus on employees in general, neglecting the distinct challenges interns face. This study seeks to address this gap by investigating the causes of stress among interns and comparing how stress manifests in both online and offline settings.

The motivation behind this research arises from both personal experiences and broader societal concerns. With internships playing an increasingly vital role in career development, it is crucial to understand the stressors interns encounter for their overall well-being and success. This study seeks to identify and address these stress factors, aiming to improve support systems for interns. By comparing stress effects across different internship settings,

the research aspires to contribute to better stress management strategies, enhancing the internship experience for future participants.

Review of Literature

The study of Christopher Mensah, Edem M. Azila-Gbetteor, Melody Enyonam Appietu & Judith Semefa Agbodza, explores stress experiences among Hospitality and Marketing students during internships and examines stress's impact on internship satisfaction and turnover intentions. A principal component analysis (PCA) on 43 stress factors was conducted with 4 major latent dimensions as alienation/disregard, financial challenges, interpersonal issues, and workload. The findings underscore the need for financial support, improved working conditions, and structured support systems for interns to enhance their productivity and overall internship experience.

The study further uncovered that Hospitality students experienced significantly more stressors than Marketing students due to the strict and demanding nature of the hospitality jobs.

Additionally, the study found that stress negatively influenced internship satisfaction and increased turnover intentions. In conclusion, the paper suggests Universities and industries should collaborate to develop appropriate compensation packages, including insurance and stipends, to support and incentivize interns and Efforts should be made to minimize workplace stressors by specifying working hours and work tasks before the start of internships to provide a clear framework.

The research conducted by T. P. LAM, J. G. W. S. WONG, MARY S.M. IP, K. F. LAM & S. L. PANG, adopts both qualitative and quantitative methods to investigate stressors faced by medical interns. As part of the qualitative method, 23 medical interns were invited for interviews and for the quantitative method, a questionnaire survey was distributed among 155 medical interns which employed the DASS-21 tool. According to the questionnaire, the primary sources of stress identified were workload and long working hours while Focus group interviews highlighted issues such as frequent night time calls and the demanding nature of extended work hours as major contributors to stress. The focus group interviews also discussed major stress relieving methods which included taking holidays, peer support, and adequate sleep. To conclude with, the authors suggested implementation of non-stigmatizing and accessible mental health services, along with workplace stress reduction measures, in order to support medical interns in their formative years.

Study by Stefanie E. Mayer, Nestor L. Lopez-Duran, Srijan Sen and James L. Abelson explored the relationship between chronic stress, hair cortisol levels, and depressive symptoms among medical interns throughout their internship year. The study revealed that both hair cortisol levels and depressive symptoms increased with the onset of the internship however both had different dimensions of stress responsivity. On one hand where depressive symptoms were closely related to external demands and subjective stress perceptions, such as increased work hours, reduced sleep, and perceived stress, in contrast, hair cortisol responses were more likely influenced by factors like anticipation, novelty, and social-evaluative threats. Thus, concluding that hair cortisol levels did not correlate with depressive symptoms. The paper ends with highlighting the

scope of future research related to stress exposure and advancement and hair cortisol measurement.

The study by Wang, Chiang, and Lee (2014) examines the significant impact of stress on internship students, particularly culinary interns, and its implications for their future professional success and well-being. Culinary internships provide practical experience and skill development but also expose students to stress influenced by interpersonal relationships, workload pressure, and the work environment. A quantitative analysis was conducted using data from 120 culinary students who have completed or are undergoing internships in the Klang Valley area. Data were collected through self-administered questionnaires based on students' actual experiences. The study highlights that interpersonal relationships, workload pressure, and the work environment are significant contributors to job stress among culinary interns. Understanding these factors is essential for developing strategies to improve the internship experience and support students' well-being and professional growth.

The research conducted by Edem M. Azila-Gbetteor, Ernestina Atsu, and Abigail Nana Konadu Quarshie examines the interplay between job stress, job involvement, and perceived coworker support among tertiary interns. Internships, while crucial for skill development and employability, can induce significant job stress, negatively affecting job involvement. The study employs Social Capital Theory (SCT), which posits that social networks provide valuable resources. Coworker support, as social capital, can mitigate the negative impacts of job stress on job involvement.

In a study by E. Hannan, N. Breslin, E. Doherty, M. McGreal, D. Moneley, and G. Offiah, 101 interns across four Irish hospitals were surveyed over two years. The anonymous survey gathered demographic information and assessed mental health using the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI), a stress scale, and the 12-item General Health Questionnaire (GHQ-12). The results revealed that 37% of interns were experiencing psychological distress. High levels of emotional exhaustion (55.4%), depersonalization (51.5%), and a low sense of personal accomplishment (41.6%) were reported. Key stressors included insufficient clinical preparation, financial issues, ambiguous role definitions, and sleep deprivation. Many interns were not aware of available support services and showed a desire to leave Ireland after their internship. Addressing burnout and stress is crucial, with improved clinical preparation and increased awareness of support services being essential to mitigate these issues.

Methodology

The methodology of this study was carefully structured to comprehensively assess the perceived stressors among students across different educational levels. A cross-sectional survey approach was employed, comprising two distinct sections to gather relevant data.

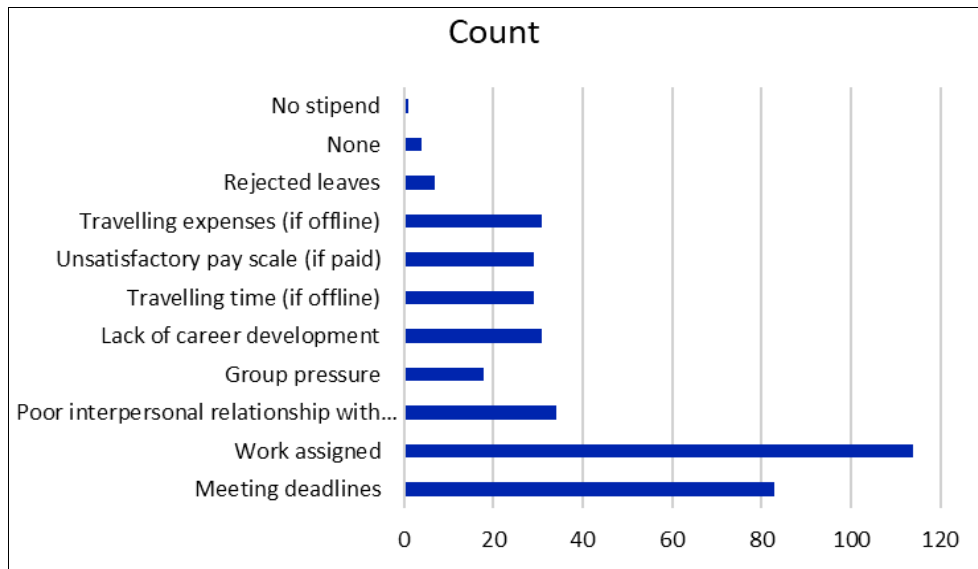
In this study, we collected data from a total of 200 respondents. In the first section, the survey collected basic socio-demographic information from participants, including gender, university affiliation, year of study, and program of study. This section also gathered details about the participants' educational background, specifically whether they were from schooling institutions or pursuing undergraduate or postgraduate degrees. The second section

of the survey focused on the specific stressors experienced by students. Participants were asked to report on 10 distinct stressors that they might have faced during their studies, such as workload, interpersonal conflicts, and financial challenges. Additionally, this section included questions designed to capture the effects and outcomes associated with these stressors, such as emotional, physical, and academic impacts. By systematically collecting data on both the presence of stressors and their perceived effects, the study aimed to provide a nuanced understanding of how different stress factors influence student well-being across various educational stages.

Descriptive statistics were employed to detail the profile of respondents and to provide an overview of their stress

experiences. This analysis offered a clear picture of the demographic and educational backgrounds of the participants, as well as a summary of the various stressors they encountered. Exploratory factor analysis was utilized to identify and understand the underlying dimensions of the stressors, allowing for a deeper insight into the patterns and relationships among the different stress factors. This approach provided a comprehensive understanding of the stress landscape among students, highlighting key areas of concern that may require further attention.

Theory
Reasons for stress



Interns often face substantial stress, which can significantly affect their mental health. This stress contributes to increased levels of anxiety and depression, highlighting the need for effective support systems. One of the study's objectives was to identify the primary stressors that students encounter during their internships.

A list of 10 perceived stressors was circulated in the form of

a questionnaire among subjects, along with an "others" option, to gain insights on the stressors faced by interns in both online and offline internships.

As per Table 1, the findings reveal that "work assigned", "meeting deadlines" were the two major reasons for stress according to the respondents. Whereas "Unpaid internship" and "Rejected leaves" were the least expected stress factors.

Table 1: Perceived Stressors in Internships

Reasons for stress	Count	Percentage	Z-Statistics	P-Value
Meeting deadlines	83	22%	1.474	0.14
Work assigned	114	30%	2.419	0.016
Poor interpersonal relationship with colleagues	34	9%	-0.019	0.985
Group pressure	18	5%	-0.507	0.612
Lack of career development	31	8%	-0.111	0.912
Travelling time (if offline)	29	8%	-0.172	0.864
Unsatisfactory pay scale (if paid)	29	8%	-0.172	0.864
Travelling expenses (if offline)	31	8%	-0.111	0.912
Rejected leaves	7	2%	-0.842	0.4
No Stipend	1	0%	-1.025	0.305
None	4	1%	-0.934	0.35

The study categorized the perceived stressors faced by interns into four primary areas: alienation/disregard (3 items), financial challenges (4 items), interpersonal issues (2 items), and workload-related pressures (3 items). By applying Principal Component Analysis (PCA), specific stress factors within each category were identified and were quantified through eigenvalues and principal component (PC) scores. The workload category emerged as the most

significant, with "work assigned" and "meeting deadlines" showing the highest PC values, indicating their substantial impact on overall stress levels. Financial challenges, such as inadequate pay and travel-related expenses, were also prominent, particularly for offline internships.

Table 2 presents a summary of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) results, including the principal component (PC) values and corresponding eigenvalues for each

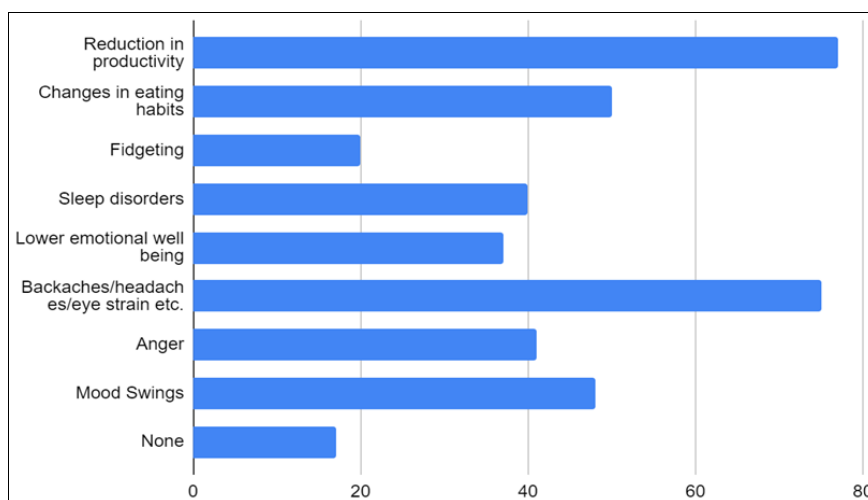
identified stress factor. The eigenvalues indicate the variance explained by each component, with higher eigenvalues representing components that account for a larger portion of the total variance. The PC values highlight

the relative weight of each stressor within its category, identifying key factors that contribute most significantly to overall stress levels.

Table 2: Presents a summary of the Principal Component Analysis (PCA) results

Variable	PC Value	Eigenvalue
Factor 1: Alienation/Disregard		1.5
Group pressure	0.78	
Rejected leaves	0.69	
Being ignored or disregarded at the workplace	0.72	
Factor 2: Financial Challenges		1.8
Unsatisfactory pay scale (if paid)	0.91	
Travelling time (if offline)	0.88	
Travelling expenses (if offline)	0.86	
No stipend	0.79	
Factor 3: Interpersonal		1.3
Poor interpersonal relationships with colleagues	0.82	
Group pressure	0.76	
Factor 4: Workload		2.1
Meeting deadlines	0.94	
Work assigned	0.98	
Lack of career development	0.85	

Effects of stress



Stress can manifest in a variety of ways, impacting individuals across multiple dimensions. It is universally recognized that every life event elicits a unique response or change in individuals. Interns demonstrate a spectrum of reactions to various situations, with stress manifesting in physical, mental, or combined forms. Notably, the same scenario can induce varying levels of stress among different

individuals. A questionnaire detailing 9 possible effects of stress, along with a "none" option, was circulated to gather insights on the stress experienced by interns in both online and offline internships. Respondents were permitted to choose more than one option.

Table 3: Reduction in productivity" and "Backaches/headaches/eye strain

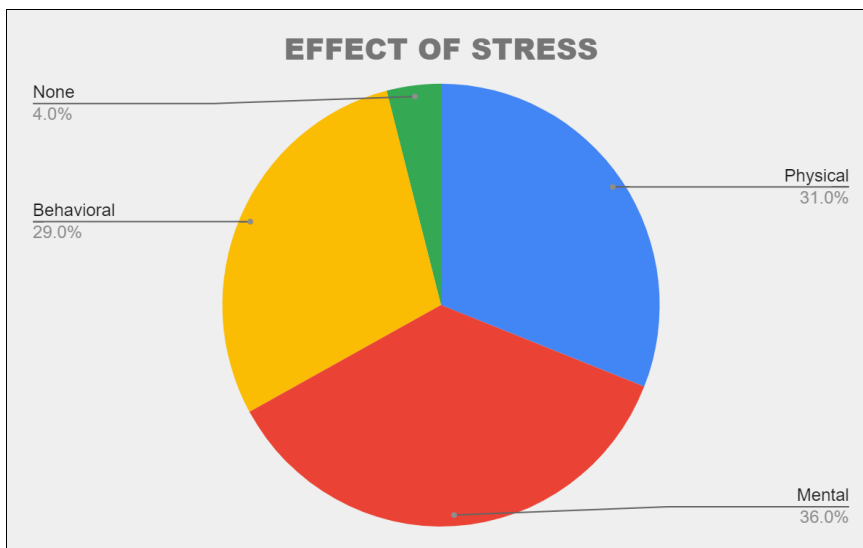
Effects of stress	Count	Percentage	
Emotional and Psychological			31%
Mood swings	48	12%	
Anger	41	10%	
Lower emotional well being	37	9%	
Behavioral and Performance			36%
Fidgeting	20	5%	
Reduction in productivity	77	19%	
Changes in eating habits	50	12%	
Physical			29%
Backaches/headaches/eye strain etc.	75	19%	
Sleep disorders	40	10%	
None	17	4%	

As per Table 3, research reveals that "Reduction in productivity" and "Backaches/headaches/eye strain, etc." are the primary stressors reported by interns, each affecting 19% of respondents.

Effects such as "Fidgeting" and "Lower emotional well-being" are reported by fewer respondents making them the minor effects of stress. The fact that only 4% of respondents

selected "None" indicates that stress is a prevalent issue among interns, with 96% experiencing at least one of the listed effects.

As per Table 3, the effects of stress can generally be categorized into physical, emotional/psychological, and behavioral effects.



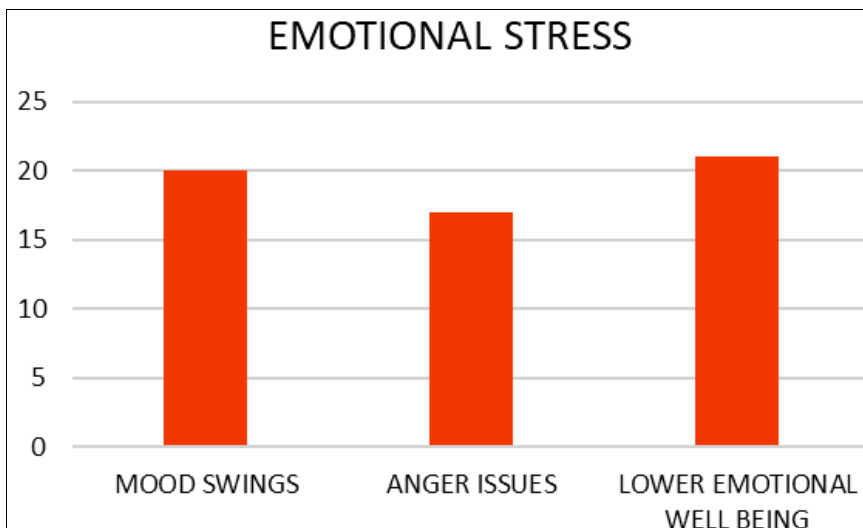
Stress has a profound effect on mental and emotional well-being, influencing mood, cognitive abilities, and overall psychological health. The study indicates that 31% of interns experience emotional and psychological stress, manifesting as mood swings, anger, and reduced emotional availability. Those under stress frequently encounter irritability, frustration, and heightened sensitivity to anger or sadness, making it challenging to regulate their emotions.

In response to stress, individuals often alter their behavior in an attempt to cope, with these changes potentially being either adaptive or maladaptive, depending on their impact on health and well-being. Notably, 36% of respondents report experiencing behavioral stress, including fidgeting, reduced productivity, and changes in eating habits. Stress can lead to significant alterations in appetite, resulting in overeating (commonly known as "stress eating") or undereating, which may cause weight fluctuations and potentially contribute to eating disorders. Stress also often

leads to procrastination, as people may avoid tasks or responsibilities, thereby increasing stress as these tasks accumulate. Additionally, some individuals develop nervous habits like nail-biting, foot-tapping, or fidgeting, which often serve as unconscious outlets for stress and anxiety.

Physiologically, stress triggers a range of physical symptoms as the body responds to stressors. According to the research, 29% of respondents report experiencing physical stress, such as sleep disorders, backaches, headaches, and eye strain.

Recognizing these three categories of stress effects—physical, emotional/psychological, and behavioral—offers a thorough understanding of how stress permeates various aspects of an individual's life. This highlights the multifaceted nature of stress and emphasizes the importance of effective stress management for maintaining overall health and well-being.



Conclusion

The study highlights the intricate stress-related issues that interns encounter in both online and offline settings, underscoring the pressing need for customized solutions to lessen their detrimental impacts. Tight deadlines, severe workloads, financial hardships, and travel-related problems are major stressors; offline internships present additional logistical obstacles. The results demonstrate that stress has a substantial negative emotional, physical, and behavioral impact on interns, which lowers their general well-being and productivity.

Since internships are crucial for job advancement, institutions and organizations should set up robust support networks. These could offer financial assistance, mental health resources, open lines of communication on expectations, and flexible scheduling to meet the individual requirements of interns. Interpersonal tension can be decreased and the internship experience can be enhanced by creating a friendly atmosphere through peer participation and sympathetic supervisors.

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