

# Gender Differences in Susceptibility to Stress

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## Background and Purpose

The purpose of this study was to research gender differences in susceptibility to stress. There also was an interest in studying which gender perceived the most stress in his/her life. A recent study of perceived stress, (Sitz & Poche, 2006), hypothesized that women would display more optimism than men and would report lower levels of perceived stress. A study by Taylor in 2002 found that men are more susceptible to the health effects of stress. In 1998 Dill and Henley found that attending social events could induce more stress on collegiate students rather than reducing their stress. Several studies have been conducted over students consumption of alcohol; Engs & Hanson (2000) found that male college students are prone to drink more often, consume more alcohol, and have more problems due to alcohol than female students.

Hypothesis 1: Male seniors are the most susceptible to stress.

## Method

There were 84 participants, 40 males and 44 females (a minimum of 10 participants from each classification: Freshman-Senior), all recruited from Stephen F. Austin State University. The design was a 2 (Gender: male, female) X 4 (Classification: Freshman, Sophomore, Junior, Senior) between subjects study. The Independent Variables are Gender and Classification. Two stress-related surveys were administrated, the Susceptibility to Stress Scale (SUS) and the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS). The Dependent Variables are the scores participants made on the two stress scales. The SUS is a 21 question scale that determines the susceptibility to stress an individual has.

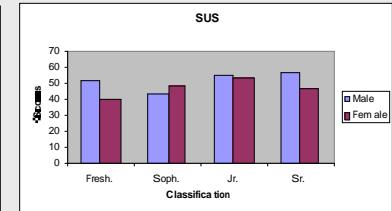
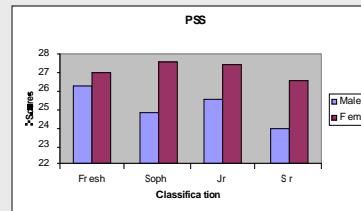
The Perceived Stress Scale is related to feelings and thoughts an individual has had over the past month; it is designed to measure the degree in which life situations are labeled as stressful. There are seven positive-related questions which are reverse scored. Both scales were measured by adding the response to each question and obtaining the total sum. The lower the score obtained on the SUS the less susceptibility to stress. Low scores on the PSS translate to a low amount of perceived stress over the past month. High scores on the scales indicate high levels of susceptibility to stress and perceived stress.

Participants were given a consent form, a demographics survey (asking for gender and classification) and the two stress scales. Counterbalancing was used during the administration of the surveys. Upon completion, participants who wanted to know how they scored were welcome to stay; however once the surveys were collected participants were free to leave.

## Results

On the PSS scale there was no main effect for gender with  $F(1, 83) = 1.64, p>.05$ . No main effect was found for classification either with  $F(3, 83) = .18, p>.05$ . There also was no interaction effect with  $F(3, 83) = .1, p>.05$ .

The SUS scale had no main effect for gender with  $F(1, 85) = 2.98, p>.05$ . A main effect for classification failed to show up as well with  $F(3, 85) = 2.35, p>.05$ . Finally no interaction effect occurred on the SUS with  $F(3, 85) = 1.87, p>.05$ . The below graphs demonstrate that there were no main or interaction effects in the study:



## Discussion

There were no significant effects for gender or classification found in this study. The mean score for male seniors on the SUS was 57.4, in comparison the mean score for female seniors on the SUS was 47.1. The second highest mean score for the SUS was 54.4 by male juniors. Female juniors scored a similar score of 53.2, none of these statistics correlate to main or interaction effects but it relates to the original hypothesis. For the PSS male seniors actually had the lowest mean with an average score of 23.9. Meaning they perceive the less stress in their life over the past month, the complete opposite of what was hypothesized. Female sophomores scored the highest average on the PSS, with an average 27.5.

It might have been useful to include other demographics such as age or ethnicity, also a larger sample size would have been beneficial to the validity of the study. Although there were no significant effects found, all college students are susceptible to stress. Future research should focus on larger sample sizes, and implement positive methods of lowering stress levels

## References

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