

## NAVIGATING LIFE'S CHALLENGES IN UNDERGRADUATES: AN IN-DEPTH EXPLORATION OF GENDER DISPARITIES IN COPING STRATEGIES AND SUCCESSES (A LITERATURE REVIEW)

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### Abstract

This comprehensive literature review investigates gender disparities among undergraduates in Sri Lanka, exploring academic, financial, and social challenges. Despite women displaying higher enrollment, graduation rates, and academic performance, disparities extend to employment, relationships, and gender-based violence. Success stories highlight women breaking societal norms and men challenging traditional roles. The dynamic coping strategies employed underscore the necessity of ongoing support, policy changes, and societal awareness. An intersectional lens reveals unique challenges based on race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation. The review emphasizes the urgency of interventions for gender disparities, offering insights for policymakers, educators, and institutions. The subsequent examination of undergraduate life in Sri Lanka delves into academic pressure, financial hardships, limited support services, job prospects, and social issues. Gender-specific challenges demonstrate how societal expectations shape women's and men's experiences in higher education. The coping strategies section categorizes mechanisms and explores gender-specific ones, indicating potential disparities influenced by societal expectations. Factors affecting coping strategies, such as the work environment and social support, are discussed. The impact of coping strategies on academic success is analyzed, highlighting the symbiotic relationship between effective coping mechanisms and positive outcomes. The review concludes by outlining future research directions, advocating for an intersectionality perspective, longitudinal studies, and a focus on mental health's role in academic success. Implications for policy and practice stress the need for inclusive support services, faculty training programs, and initiatives promoting mental health awareness to create a supportive environment for all undergraduates.

**Keywords:** Coping Strategies, Gender Disparities, Life challenges, Mental health, Undergraduates

### Introduction

The exploration of gender disparities in higher education is a complex endeavor that necessitates a nuanced examination of the multifaceted challenges faced by both women and men. To comprehend this landscape comprehensively, it

is crucial to differentiate between gender disparity and gender biases, providing a conceptual foundation for subsequent analysis. Gender disparity, as defined in academic literature, refers to any difference between individuals indirectly caused by their gender,

while gender biases are differences directly affected by gender (Bellotti, 2023; Santi & Corona, 2023). This distinction lays the groundwork for an in-depth exploration of the challenges encountered by undergraduate students based on their gender.

Recent decades have witnessed a notable shift in the educational landscape, with women surpassing their male counterparts in higher education globally. This shift presents an opportunity to scrutinize the coping mechanisms and successes of both genders as they navigate the challenges posed by gender disparities in academia (Verbree et al., 2023). Female students, on average, demonstrate higher enrollment rates, graduation rates, credit accumulation, and academic performance compared to male students. This trend prompts an exploration of the coping strategies employed by women and men in response to the evolving dynamics of gender disparities in higher education.

The disparities manifest in various facets of life, extending beyond education to impact employment, relationships, and broader societal structures (Farina et al., 2023). Gender inequality, fueled by persistent discrimination leading to unequal opportunities, is a central theme. Additionally, gender roles, influenced by biology and evident in relationships, contribute to the complexities of gender disparities. Sexism and discrimination in economic spheres and networking further compound these challenges, as do factors like poverty and cultural practices that influence gender disparity in education.

One alarming consequence of gender disparities is the prevalence of gender-based violence, stemming from broader inequalities. This disturbing phenomenon underscores the urgent need to address gender disparities comprehensively, not only within educational settings but across society as a whole (Tanton et

al., 2023). This comprehensive literature review seeks to illuminate the coping strategies employed by both women and men as they confront and overcome the obstacles presented by gender disparities throughout their undergraduate educational endeavours.

By immersing ourselves in the vast expanse of academic literature on this subject, a nuanced understanding emerges, emphasizing the significance of unravelling these coping mechanisms not only within the realm of scholarly discourse but also for the broader objective of cultivating an educational environment that champions inclusivity. As we explore the existing body of knowledge, it becomes evident that delving into the coping strategies adopted by individuals navigating gender imbalances contributes not only to the academic understanding of these dynamics but also to the practical goal of establishing educational spaces that are truly supportive of the diverse needs and experiences of all undergraduate students.

The insights gained from this review can serve as a foundation for informed policy-making, curriculum development, and institutional practices that foster an environment where every student, regardless of gender, can thrive academically and personally. In essence, this literature review transcends the confines of academic exploration by underscoring the real-world implications of understanding and addressing gender disparities in undergraduate education. It serves as a call to action for educators, policymakers, and institutions to proactively engage with and implement strategies that promote equality, inclusivity, and ultimately, the success of all individuals within the diverse landscape of higher education.

Exploring coping strategies requires an examination of the psychological, social, and

institutional aspects that contribute to the resilience of individuals facing gender disparities. Women, who often bear the brunt of discriminatory practices, have developed a range of coping mechanisms, including building support networks, seeking mentorship, and actively challenging gender norms. Men, facing their own set of challenges, may employ strategies such as seeking allyship, redefining masculinity, and advocating for gender equality. Successes in the face of gender disparities are multifaceted and extend beyond academic achievements. Women's success stories often involve breaking through societal expectations, excelling in male-dominated fields, and contributing to the dismantling of gender stereotypes. Men, in their successes, may challenge traditional gender roles, advocate for inclusivity, and actively participate in creating an environment conducive to equality.

However, it is essential to recognize that the landscape of gender disparities is continually evolving, and the coping strategies employed by individuals are dynamic responses to these changes. Institutional support, policy changes, and societal awareness are critical in shaping an environment where gender disparities are addressed comprehensively. The literature also emphasizes the importance of intersectionality in understanding gender disparities. Intersectionality considers how various social categories, such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and sexual orientation, intersect with gender, resulting in unique experiences and challenges.

Examining gender disparities through an intersectional lens provides a more nuanced understanding and helps in formulating inclusive policies and interventions. In conclusion, the exploration of gender disparities in higher education requires a comprehensive understanding of the challenges faced by

individuals based on their gender. This literature review delves into the nuances of gender disparity and biases, examines coping strategies and successes, and underscores the importance of addressing these issues for creating an inclusive educational environment. Recognizing the intersectionality of these challenges is crucial for formulating effective policies and interventions that cater to the diverse needs of all undergraduate students, fostering a more equitable and supportive educational landscape.

### **Materials and Methodology**

This literature review aims to explore gender disparities in coping strategies and successes among undergraduate women and men. A systematic and comprehensive search was conducted in electronic databases, including Google Scholar, PubMed, Scopus, JSTOR, and PsycINFO, from inception to the most recent publications up to January 2024. The following keywords and MeSH terms were utilized: "gender disparities," "coping strategies," "undergraduates," "academic success," "women undergraduates," and "men undergraduates." Boolean operators (AND, OR) were employed to refine the search and capture relevant articles addressing the intersection of gender, coping strategies, and academic success. Studies were included based on predefined criteria to ensure the relevance and quality of the gathered literature. Peer-reviewed articles published in English only were considered, focusing on empirical studies that investigated gender differences in coping strategies and academic outcomes among undergraduates. Both qualitative and quantitative studies were included to provide a comprehensive understanding of the topic. Exclusion criteria encompassed studies not related to undergraduates, non-original research (reviews, editorials), and studies lacking sufficient information on methodologies or results. The review process involved several steps: database search using the identified

keywords and MeSH terms, screening of titles and abstracts to identify potentially relevant studies, full-text assessment for eligibility, data extraction and organization into themes related to coping strategies, gender disparities, and academic success, and quality assessment of the methodological rigour of included studies using standardized tools appropriate for qualitative and quantitative research. This structured approach ensured a thorough and unbiased examination of the literature, providing valuable insights into the gender disparities in coping strategies and academic successes among undergraduate students.

### **Undergraduate life in Sri Lanka**

Undergraduate life in Sri Lanka is a dynamic and culturally rich experience, reflecting the island nation's diverse traditions and educational values. Typically, students enter universities after completing their advanced-level examinations, contributing to a vibrant academic landscape that spans various disciplines, from arts and humanities to science and technology. Notably, Sri Lankan universities are accessible to individuals of every ethnicity, gender, class, religion, and social background (Perera, 2019). The undergraduate experience in Sri Lanka extends beyond academics; it encompasses personal growth, social development, and the nurturing of leadership skills.

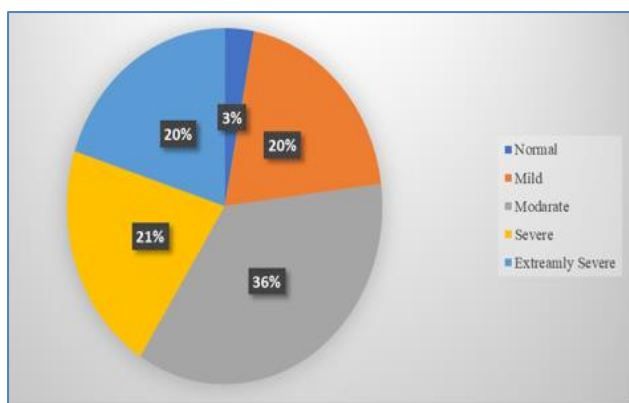
### **Challenges Faced by Undergraduates in Sri Lanka**

Undergraduate life in Sri Lanka introduces a distinctive array of challenges for students embarking on higher education. Through extensive research, several key challenges commonly encountered by undergraduates in Sri Lanka have been identified, encompassing academic pressure, financial hardships, limited support services, constrained job prospects, and social problems (Amarasuriya et al., 2015; Perera, 2014; Weerasooriya, 2013).

### **Academic Pressure**

Academic pressure among Sri Lankan undergraduates poses a pervasive and intricate challenge that significantly impacts the lives of those pursuing higher education. The relentless pursuit of academic excellence is deeply ingrained in Sri Lankan culture, fostering intense competition and heightened expectations from both families and society at large. Undergraduates in Sri Lanka routinely grapple with demanding academic schedules, rigorous coursework, and stringent performance standards. The emphasis on success in examinations, particularly the highly competitive university entrance exams, further contributes to the stress they endure. Beyond academic demands, financial constraints and limited resources may exacerbate the stress experienced by students. Additionally, students express heightened stress due to factors directly associated with their education, such as academic workload and the lack of time for leisure, sports, music, and other extracurricular activities (Praveeni & Herath, 2020; Weerasinghe & Fernando, 2018).

A study has revealed that male undergraduates experience greater stress than their female counterparts, and the level of academic workload emerges as a significant determinant of stress (Weerasinghe et al., 2012). Research articles consistently indicate that undergraduate students in Sri Lanka grapple with substantial academic pressure, leading to elevated levels of stress and mental health issues. One study disclosed that stress levels among undergraduates were distributed as follows: 3% normal, 20% mild, 36% moderate, and 41% severe, as illustrated in the first figure (Madhusanka et al., 2021).



Source: Madhusanka, et. al., 2021

Figure 1: Stress level of Undergraduates Sri Lanka

### Financial Hardships

Financial hardships are a widespread challenge for Sri Lankan undergraduates, hindering academic pursuits and casting a shadow over higher education. Many students grapple with limited financial resources, making it difficult to cover essential expenses like tuition fees and accommodation. The escalating cost of living and economic uncertainties worsen the financial strain (Mahees, 2020). To cope, undergraduates often take on part-time jobs, compromising their education quality, leading to fatigue, reduced study time, and diminished concentration. This delicate balance contributes to heightened stress levels, affecting mental health. Financial constraints also limit access to educational materials and technological tools, impacting online learning and collaborative projects. The impact of financial hardships differs between genders, with males potentially facing delays in accessing higher education, while females navigate cultural norms prioritizing male education. Part-time employment affects both genders differently, with males compromising academic involvement and females juggling domestic responsibilities alongside jobs. Financial stress impacts male mental health and female emotional well-being due to societal pressures. Limited finances also restrict access to educational resources for both genders,

potentially compromising the overall quality of education. Moreover, financial hardships may influence career choices, with males opting for immediate employment and females contending with societal expectations prioritizing family responsibilities. In summary, these challenges warrant comprehensive attention and intervention to address the multifaceted impact on academic performance, mental health, gender disparities, and career choices among Sri Lankan undergraduates (Wijesekara, 2022; Wickramasinghe et al., 2023; Liu et al., 2023).

### Limited Support Services

Insufficient support services for undergraduate students in Sri Lanka present a significant obstacle to academic success and overall educational experience. The absence of inadequacy of crucial support structures poses challenges that can adversely affect students pursuing higher education in the country. A primary concern revolves around the lack of comprehensive counseling and guidance services. Many undergraduates grapple with issues such as academic stress, career choices, and personal challenges without access to professional support. The dearth of counseling services not only hampers students' ability to navigate the demands of university life but also has a detrimental impact on their mental well-being (Zuhairi et al., 2020). Moreover, limited access to essential academic resources, including well-equipped libraries, up-to-date research materials, and technological infrastructure, can impede students' academic progress. The absence of proper resources may result in students struggling to conduct thorough research, ultimately affecting the quality of their academic work. The transition to e-learning has introduced additional challenges, including limited technical support and difficulties in accessing required course materials. This shift disproportionately affects women, who may exhibit varying levels of confidence in using technology and online

learning platforms compared to their male counterparts. Such discrepancies in technological proficiency can significantly influence women's performance and engagement in e-learning environments (Gunawardena & Karunanayake, 2008).

### **Constrained Job Prospects**

In Sri Lanka, undergraduate students are confronted with a formidable academic challenge manifested in the form of constrained job prospects. Despite their diligent efforts and acquisition of skills during their degree programs, many graduates find themselves grappling with limited opportunities within the job market. This predicament can be attributed to a confluence of factors, including economic fluctuations, evolving industry demands, and a significant misalignment between the academic curriculum and the actual needs of the job market. A preliminary survey highlights the stark reality, revealing that 53% of graduates in Sri Lanka are presently employed in careers that are unrelated to their field of study. This disparity is exacerbated by a multitude of issues, notably the lack of practical experiences, heightened competition among job seekers, the impact of political changes on employment dynamics, and a dearth of financial resources for pursuing career goals (Ratnayake & Elvitigala, 2020). Furthermore, the gender disparity in the workforce paints a concerning picture. Over the last two decades, the women's workforce participation rate in Sri Lanka has consistently been half that of men. Shockingly, only about one in three women of working age are employed, a figure less than half of the global average. This gender imbalance underscores the need for targeted interventions to address barriers hindering women's entry into and advancement within the workforce (Wijesekera, 2020).

### **Social Problems**

Social problems among undergraduates in Sri Lanka are multifaceted, encompassing a range of issues that significantly impact the well-being of students. These challenges include crime, alcohol and drug abuse, family disorganization, domestic violence, suicide, mental illnesses, sexual abuse, corruption, and poverty (Perera, 2009). Crime, often exacerbated by economic disparities and social unrest, poses a tangible threat to the safety of students. The prevalence of criminal activities creates an environment of fear and insecurity, affecting not only the academic experience but also the overall quality of campus life. Alcohol and drug abuse represent pervasive issues among undergraduates, frequently driven by peer pressure and the pursuit of an escape from stressors. These harmful behaviors not only jeopardize academic performance but also pose serious risks to the health and future prospects of students. Family disorganization, including instances of divorce and strained relationships, contributes to emotional distress and academic challenges. Students grappling with familial issues may find it difficult to focus on their studies, impacting their overall well-being and hindering their academic success. Domestic violence within households, whether witnessed or experienced, creates hostile living environments that further impede students' overall well-being. Such traumatic experiences can have long-lasting effects on mental health and academic performance. The intense academic pressure prevalent in Sri Lanka may lead to severe mental health issues, including suicidal thoughts. The weight of academic expectations can take a toll on the psychological well-being of undergraduates, necessitating the prioritization of mental health support services. Sexual abuse incidents and the prevalence of corruption undermine the safety and integrity of educational institutions. These issues erode the trust within the academic community and hinder the pursuit of education in a secure and

supportive environment. The political environment in the country also plays a role in shaping campus life. Student activism, while crucial for expressing concerns, can sometimes lead to clashes with authorities, creating a tense atmosphere on university campuses. Balancing the right to express opinions with maintaining a conducive learning environment is an ongoing challenge. Additionally, ongoing technological advancements and globalization bring about cultural shifts that can create a generation gap among undergraduates. This gap may lead to misunderstandings and conflicts between traditional values and modern perspectives, adding another layer of complexity to the social dynamics on campuses. (Howe & Strauss, 1992; Vaccaro et al., 2020).

### **Challenges Faced by Women Undergraduates**

Women undergraduates encounter a myriad of challenges that are intricately woven into the fabric of academia. One of the primary hurdles they face is the persistence of gender-specific challenges within educational institutions. This can manifest in subtle biases, limited representation in certain fields, and stereotyping that may affect academic opportunities and advancement. Societal pressures and expectations add another layer of complexity for women pursuing undergraduate degrees. Balancing academic responsibilities with societal expectations related to traditional gender roles can create a unique set of challenges. Women may feel compelled to navigate the delicate equilibrium between fulfilling academic aspirations and meeting societal expectations regarding family roles, career choices, and personal life. Intersectionality further intensifies the challenges faced by women undergraduates. The convergence of gender with other factors such as race, ethnicity, socioeconomic status, and more can amplify the complexity of their experiences. Women from diverse backgrounds may encounter distinct barriers that require

nanced approaches to overcome (Jabbari et al., 2023; Varsik & Gorochovskij, 2023; Ang et al., 2022).

### **Challenges Faced by Men Undergraduates**

Men undergraduates encounter a spectrum of obstacles that require resilience and adaptability. Academic pressures, societal expectations, and personal development hurdles converge to create a distinctive landscape of challenges. In the academic realm, male undergraduates may grapple with the demanding workload, competitive environments, and the pursuit of excellence. Balancing coursework, assignments, and exams while striving to meet high academic standards can be an arduous task. Additionally, the pressure to perform well academically may intersect with societal expectations, pushing men to excel in traditionally male-dominated fields or adhere to specific career paths. Societal expectations often play a significant role in shaping the challenges faced by male undergraduates. Traditional gender norms may impose expectations related to masculinity, influencing how men perceive themselves and their roles within the academic community. Striking a balance between academic pursuits and conforming to societal expectations can become a delicate dance, impacting self-esteem and personal growth. Personal development hurdles also characterize the challenges encountered by male undergraduates. Navigating relationships, building a sense of identity, and coping with emotional well-being can be complex undertakings. Societal norms and stereotypes may affect how men express vulnerability, making it challenging to seek support when needed. As individuals in a transformative phase of life, male undergraduates grapple with the intricate process of self-discovery while striving to meet external expectations (Jabbari et al., 2023; (Ang et al., 2022; Van Buren, 2019; Sampogna et al., 2021).  
Coping Strategies

Coping strategies encompass intentional efforts and adaptive techniques employed by individuals to effectively manage and navigate challenging situations, stressors, or emotional difficulties. These strategies, diverse and vary from person to person, comprise a combination of psychological, behavioural, and emotional approaches. Common coping mechanisms include problem-solving, seeking social support, mindfulness practices, engaging in physical activities, and cultivating positive thinking patterns. The role of coping strategies is crucial in promoting resilience, maintaining mental well-being, and enhancing the ability to cope with life's inevitable fluctuations. Developing a repertoire of effective coping strategies is essential for navigating personal problems and adversity in a healthy and constructive manner. These intentional approaches can be categorized into various types. Problem-focused coping involves directly addressing the root cause of stress through activities like problem-solving and proactive intervention. Emotion-focused coping centers on managing emotional responses to stress, utilizing techniques such as mindfulness and expressing feelings. Seeking social support involves reaching out to friends, family, or support groups for comfort and advice, fostering a sense of connection. While avoidance coping may offer short-term relief, it involves intentionally steering clear of stressors. Cognitive restructuring focuses on changing negative thought patterns through positive self-talk and reframing perspectives. Physical coping incorporates activities like exercise and yoga to promote both mental and physical well-being. Humor and laughter provide a unique avenue for gaining a different perspective on challenges. Mindfulness and relaxation techniques, including meditation and deep breathing, contribute to stress reduction. Spiritual coping draws on faith and religious beliefs for support, while engaging in hobbies and leisure activities offers a positive outlet. By cultivating a diverse coping toolkit,

individuals can enhance their resilience and effectively manage the inevitable ups and downs of life. This comprehensive approach empowers individuals to navigate stress, challenges, and emotional upheavals with greater adaptability and overall well-being (Ronen, 2021; Zimmer-Gembeck & Skinner, 2016; Dong et al., 2021).

### **Coping Strategies and Gender Disparities in Undergraduates Sri Lanka**

Gender disparities in coping strategies often manifest in distinct ways, influenced by societal expectations, cultural norms, and traditional gender roles. These factors contribute to differential stressors experienced by male and female undergraduates, impacting their mental health outcomes and academic performance. Females may face unique challenges related to societal expectations regarding academic achievement, family responsibilities, and career aspirations, while males may grapple with pressures associated with traditional notions of masculinity. A specific study from a CINEC Academic Journal in Sri Lanka sought to identify the stressors and coping strategies practiced by healthcare undergraduates. The findings indicated statistically significant differences in coping strategies based on gender, highlighting the existence of gender disparities among healthcare undergraduates in Sri Lanka (Peiris et al., 2021). While the search results did not provide specific details on coping strategies and gender disparities in this context, existing research outside Sri Lanka reveals that female college students generally report higher stress levels and a greater use of emotion-focused coping strategies compared to their male counterparts (Brougham et al., 2009). Further, a broader study on gender differences in stress and coping styles found that women are more inclined to use emotion-focused coping strategies, aligning with the general understanding of gender disparities in coping mechanisms (Matud, 2004). Key findings related



to gender differences in coping strategies and psychological adaptation include the correlation between women using less positive reframing and higher levels of depressive symptoms. Additionally, women tend to rely on emotion-focused coping strategies, while men employ more problem-focused strategies to deal with stress. During the COVID-19 pandemic, women proved more vulnerable to developing anxiety symptoms after traumatic or stressful events, possibly due to added stressors such as working from home and childcare responsibilities. Another study investigating the impact of coping

styles and gender on situational coping found that women were more likely to use social support as a coping mechanism (Kelly et al., 2008; Cholankeril et al., 2023). Consequently, it can be inferred that similar gender differences in coping strategies may exist among undergraduates in Sri Lanka, with women potentially employing more emotion-focused coping strategies compared to men. Understanding and addressing these disparities are crucial for developing targeted interventions to support the mental well-being and academic success of all students.

Strategies	Description
Problem-focused Coping	Involves addressing the root cause of the stressor. Includes problem-solving, time management, and taking proactive steps to change the situation.
Emotion-focused Coping	Centers on managing emotional responses to stress. Examples include expressing emotions, finding ways to relax, and practicing mindfulness to regulate feelings.
Social Support	Involves seeking assistance, comfort, or advice from friends, family, or support groups. Sharing feelings and experiences with others can provide validation and a sense of connection.
Avoidance Coping	Entails intentionally avoiding the stressor or distracting oneself from it. While sometimes useful in the short term, excessive avoidance may hinder long-term coping.
Cognitive Restructuring	Focuses on changing negative thought patterns. Involves challenging irrational beliefs, adopting positive self-talk, and reframing perspectives.
Physical Coping	Includes engaging in physical activities to reduce stress. Exercise, yoga, and other forms of physical activity can contribute to both mental and physical well-being.
Humor and Laughter	Utilizing humor to lighten the mood and gain a different perspective on challenging situations. Laughter has been shown to have positive effects on both physical and mental health.
Mindfulness and Relaxation Techniques	Involves practices like meditation, deep breathing, and progressive muscle relaxation. Focusing on the present moment can help alleviate stress and promote a sense of calm.
Spiritual Coping	Drawing on one's faith or spiritual beliefs for support and guidance. Prayer, meditation, and attending religious services are examples of spiritual coping.
Hobbies and Leisure Activities	Engaging in activities that bring joy and relaxation. Pursuing hobbies provides a positive outlet and a break from stressors.

Source: made by author

Figure 2: Coping strategies

### Factors Influencing Coping Strategies

Coping strategies, vital in the face of life's challenges, are intricately shaped by a myriad of factors, each playing a pivotal role in determining how individuals navigate adversities. These influencing factors encompass various elements, such as the work environment, socio-

demographic variables, educational background, job characteristics, social support networks, levels of optimism, perceived control over one's circumstances, gender, age, and marital status. In the context of the work environment, a study among nursing personnel revealed influential factors like staff shortages, demanding shifts, and

a lack of autonomy (Zyga et al., 2016). Furthermore, the roles of gender, educational level, and job position were investigated, highlighting the multifaceted nature of coping strategies. Sociocultural elements, including societal expectations and cultural influences, create a backdrop against which coping mechanisms are developed and employed. The educational environment itself, encompassing classroom dynamics and institutional support, significantly molds the coping strategies individuals employ. Moreover, individual factors such as personality traits and past experiences add another layer of complexity to coping mechanisms, underscoring the intricate interplay of both external and internal influences on how people confront and adapt to adversity. Social support, optimism, and perceived control emerged as crucial factors that significantly influence effective coping strategies. While limited research exists on the factors shaping coping strategies among undergraduates in Sri Lanka, some studies have examined the mental health status of this demographic. For instance, a study on nursing students in Sri Lanka identified coping strategies such as avoidance, transference, problem-solving, optimism, self-reliance, spiritual approaches, and relaxation techniques (Rathnayake & Ekanayaka, 2016).

Additionally, environmental stressors were recognized, with factors like lack of time for leisure or sports and limited access to devices and internet facilities for online learning identified as sources of stress for undergraduates in Sri Lanka (Kaushani, 2023). Though the research is sparse, it suggests that coping strategies among undergraduates in the country are likely influenced by a range of factors, including social support, optimism, perceived control, and environmental stressors. Further exploration of these dynamics can provide valuable insights for developing targeted interventions to enhance coping mechanisms among this demographic.

### **Impact on Academic Success**

The profound impact of coping strategies on academic success cannot be overstated, as these strategies serve as the linchpin in determining an individual's ability to navigate the challenges and setbacks inherent in the academic environment. Coping strategies encompass the cognitive and behavioral efforts employed by individuals to effectively manage the demands of stressful situations. In the realm of academic success, these strategies wield substantial influence over a student's overall well-being and performance. Examining the intricate relationship between coping strategies and GPA reveals a significant correlation between effective coping mechanisms and academic prowess. Vital indicators of long-term academic success, such as persistence and graduation rates, further underscore the importance of understanding the interplay between coping strategies, GPA disparities, and overall well-being. Notably, research indicates that students resorting to avoidance coping strategies, including substance abuse or denial, are more susceptible to heightened stress levels.

Crucially, social support emerges as a consistent facilitator of positive outcomes for students, impacting both their well-being and academic achievements. Mental distress, conversely, has been linked to diminished academic self-efficacy and subpar study progress. Introducing mindfulness into the academic narrative, by cultivating self-awareness and promoting stress reduction, holds the potential to empower students to effectively cope with academic challenges, indirectly fostering improved mental health and contributing to academic achievement. The benchmark for academic achievement, often represented by a student's GPA, highlights the symbiotic relationship between effective coping strategies and perceived stress management through engagement strategies. Mental health plays a

pivotal role in the broader academic success narrative. Those students who adopt positive coping strategies—such as problem-solving, time management, and seeking social support—tend to experience superior academic outcomes.

Armed with these strategies, individuals are better equipped to handle the pressures associated with coursework, exams, and other academic responsibilities (Alkhawaldeh et al., 2023; McLean et al., 2022). Conversely, poor coping strategies like avoidance, procrastination, and substance abuse can exert detrimental effects on academic success. Students grappling with ineffective coping mechanisms may find it challenging to concentrate, meet deadlines, and maintain a healthy work-life balance. The ripple effect of such challenges can result in academic underperformance and cast a negative shadow on overall educational attainment. Thus, recognizing and fostering effective coping mechanisms becomes paramount in creating an environment conducive to optimal learning and academic success.

Effective coping mechanisms, such as problem-solving, time management, and seeking social support, correlate positively with GPA and contribute to overall well-being. Evidence supports that students relying on avoidance coping, like substance abuse or denial, face heightened stress levels and may struggle academically (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019). Research underscores the significance of social support in fostering positive outcomes. Additionally, introducing mindfulness into the academic context promotes stress reduction, self-awareness, and improved mental health, indirectly enhancing coping with academic challenges. The symbiotic relationship between coping strategies and perceived stress management is evident in the benchmark of academic achievement, often represented by a student's GPA (Freire et al., 2020; Pierceall &

Keim, 2007). Poor coping strategies, like avoidance and substance abuse, can lead to challenges in concentration, meeting deadlines, and maintaining work-life balance, resulting in academic underperformance. Recognizing and cultivating effective coping mechanisms are crucial for creating an environment conducive to optimal learning and academic success (Pierceall & Keim, 2007).

### **Future Research Directions**

Future research in the exploration of gender disparities in coping strategies and successes among women and men undergraduates should consider adopting an intersectionality perspective to understand how factors like race, socio-economic status, and cultural background intersect with gender in shaping coping strategies. Longitudinal studies tracking changes in coping mechanisms over the course of undergraduate education could provide insights into the long-term effects of various strategies. Additionally, there is a need for research on the relationship between mental health, coping strategies, and academic success, exploring the role of support networks and comparing coping strategies across different universities and educational systems. Gaps in the current literature include the underexplored qualitative experiences of undergraduates, the lack of cross-cultural perspectives, and the need to identify coping mechanisms that have received insufficient attention. Suggestions for further exploration involve investigating the effectiveness of gender-specific coping intervention programs, exploring the role of technology in coping, and analyzing the influence of academic policies on gender disparities. Implications for policy and practice include the development of inclusive support services, faculty training programs, policy reforms, and initiatives promoting mental health awareness to foster an environment that supports all undergraduates in their academic journeys.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, this comprehensive literature review delves into the intricate landscape of gender disparities in coping strategies and successes among women and men undergraduates. It emphasizes the need to differentiate between gender disparity and biases, laying the foundation for a nuanced exploration of challenges faced in higher education. The evolving global shift with women surpassing men in higher education prompts a thorough examination of coping mechanisms amid gender disparities. Beyond academia, these disparities permeate various aspects of life, emphasizing the urgent need for comprehensive societal changes. The review brings attention to alarming consequences, such as gender-based violence, stemming from broader inequalities. It serves as a compelling call to action for educators, policymakers, and institutions to proactively address gender disparities. By immersing in academic literature, the nuanced understanding that emerges underscores the significance of unraveling coping mechanisms. This goes beyond scholarly discourse, aiming to create educational environments that champion inclusivity.

Successes in the face of gender disparities are multifaceted, extending beyond academic achievements. Women breaking through societal expectations and men challenging traditional gender roles exemplify the transformative power of education. However, the dynamic nature of gender disparities necessitates continuous adaptation of coping strategies. Institutional support, policy changes, and societal awareness are identified as critical in shaping an environment fostering equality. The literature review extends its focus to undergraduate life in Sri Lanka, emphasizing its dynamic and culturally rich nature. It highlights the challenges faced by students, encompassing academic pressure, financial hardships, limited support

services, constrained job prospects, and social problems.

These challenges, particularly academic pressure, exhibit gender disparities with male undergraduates experiencing higher stress levels. Detailed exploration of coping strategies, both general and gender-specific, reveals a diverse array of approaches. Women often build support networks and challenge gender norms, while men seek allyship and redefine masculinity. Success stories, especially for women, involve breaking through societal expectations. The review recognizes the evolving landscape of gender disparities and the importance of intersectionality in understanding and addressing these challenges. The impact of coping strategies on academic success is underscored, emphasizing the correlation between effective coping mechanisms and positive outcomes. The role of mental health in academic achievement is highlighted, advocating for the recognition and fostering of effective coping mechanisms to create supportive learning environments. Looking ahead, the literature review suggests future research directions, including adopting an intersectionality perspective, conducting longitudinal studies, and exploring the qualitative experiences of undergraduates. It emphasizes the need for gender-specific coping intervention programs, examining the influence of technology, and analyzing academic policies contributing to gender disparities. In essence, this literature review transcends the boundaries of academic exploration. It serves as a compelling resource for informed policy-making, curriculum development, and institutional practices. The insights gained from this review have practical implications, urging stakeholders to work towards educational environments that are inclusive, equitable, and supportive of the diverse needs and experiences of all undergraduate students.

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