

# Performance pressure: research & suggestions

## Many students experience pressure

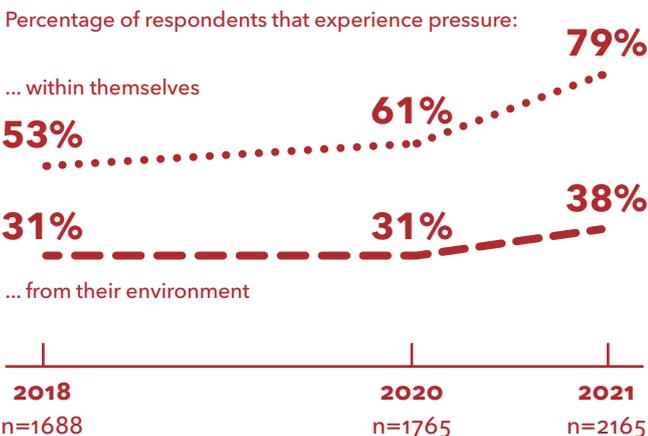
Research conducted by the Research Group Study Success indicates that many students experience performance pressure. In addition, we've noticed an increase in performance pressure in recent years. A little bit of performance pressure can be a good thing: it can facilitate concentration or hitting your deadlines. Are you feeling pressured over extensive periods of time, or are you experiencing stress, lack of sleep, or decreased concentration due to concerns about delivering on performance? Then it is probably a good plan to spring into action. With this info sheet we will explain what performance pressure entails, what causes it, and we will offer suggestions on how to handle performance pressure.

## What is it?

Performance pressure refers to pressure experienced by a person to perform well. Expectations within and outside the person play a large role in the perceived pressure. Eisenberger and Aselage (2009) define performance pressure as follows:

**“A discomforting perception of the necessity for high performance.”**

## Quantitative studies



## Outcomes from the Student Wellbeing Study 2021

**79%** experience pressure within themselves

**71%** of males experience performance pressure within themselves

**83%** of females experience performance pressure within themselves

**53%** experience performance pressure within their educational programme

**38%** experience performance pressure within their environment (e.g., family)

**37%** experience performance pressure from authorities (e.g. DUO)



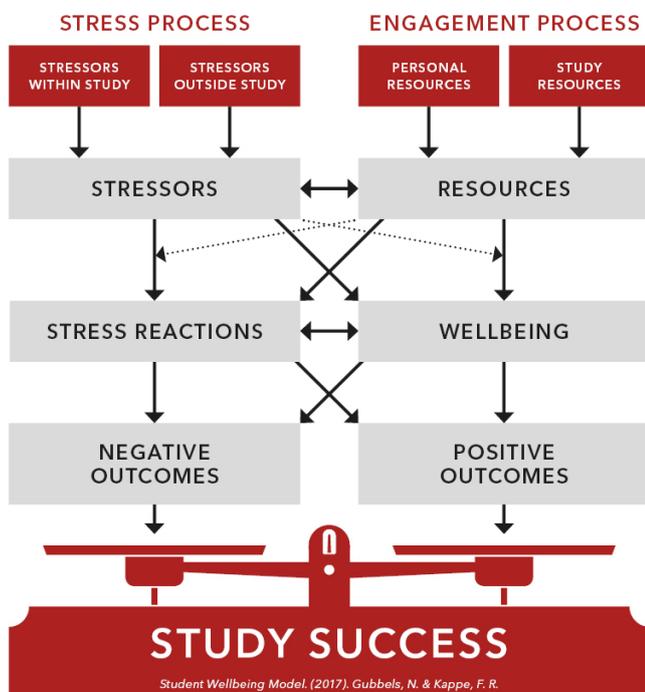
## Why is it an issue?

- Performance pressure creates stress, and long-term stress can lead to psychosocial problems (Dopmeijer, 2020).
- Students who experience more performance pressure also indicate that they experience more stress (Versteeg & Kappe, 2021).
- The extent to which students experience performance pressure predicts the occurrence of burn out symptoms (Dopmeijer, 2020).
- Besides creating a source of stress, performance pressure can also interfere with learning because it can hinder intrinsic motivation (Nationaal Regieorgaan Onderwijsonderzoek 2021; Stallman, 2010).

## Take a test

The institute for Health and Human Potential has developed a short test to **check** if you are burdened by performance pressure.





## How can you maintain balance?

The Research Group Study Success has developed a model based on the Jobs Demands and Resources model (Demerouti, 2001). This model presumes a need for balance between stressors (e.g. concerns about finances, study progress, personal circumstances) and sources of energy (e.g. social contacts, hobbies, sports) to allow effective learning. Experience of performance pressure can be labelled as a stressor. If the level of performance pressure becomes too high and is inadequately compensated for by sources of energy, the balance gets disrupted.

**“To be able to say that you are feeling insecure at times, you need self-confidence.”**

– omdenken.nl

## Practical advice

### To increase your energy:

- How are the basics? Consider adequate sleep (7-9 hours a night), exercise (at least 30 minutes a day) and a healthy diet.
- Write down which activities are energising, relaxing, or a source of happiness. Try to allocate some time during each day to engage in one of these activities.
- Make a conscious effort to do nothing: reserve time to hang back and relax.
- Spend sufficient time away from screens (tv, computer, tablet, or mobile phone). Or, alternatively, allocate specific times to use them.
- Seek out social support: share your concerns with others and allow yourself to be vulnerable among the people you trust.
- Increase your resilience by self-training to evoke positive emotions such as gratitude, compassion, and enjoyment (Fredrickson, 2001). [More info?](#)



### To reduce stress:

- Create obtainable, realistic plans. If needed, a buddy at the Student Success Centre (SSC) could support you with this task.
- Work/Study at pre-set times.
- Request help if you find yourself burdened by stress and don't wait too long to reach out. [More info?](#)
- Counter stress by applying psychological self-care:
  - Leave room for imperfections and mistakes
  - Meaningfulness: seek out work/study/activities that instill a sense of satisfaction
  - Practise self-reflection. [More info?](#)
  - Learn how to explore your own thoughts and feelings, for example by trying the e-learning module on emotional intelligence (free for Inholland students). [More info?](#)
  - Learn to say 'no'.



## Share your experiences

It is important to continue to research and discuss the causes and consequences of performance pressure. We are looking for students who experience performance pressure and have developed clever ideas and strategies on how to cope. Share your suggestions via [studiesucces@inholland.nl](mailto:studiesucces@inholland.nl)

## References

- Demerouti, E., Bakker, A.B., Nachreiner, F. & Schaufeli, W.B. (2001). The job demands and resources model of burnout. *Journal of Applied Psychology*, 86, 499-512.
- Dopmeijer, J.M. (2020). Running on empty. The impact of challenging student life on wellbeing and academic performance. Amsterdam: Universiteit van Amsterdam.
- Eisenberger, R. & Aselage, J. (2009). Incremental Effects of Reward on Experienced Performance Pressure: Positive Outcomes for Intrinsic Interest and Creativity. *Journal of Organizational Behavior*, 30 (1), 95-117.
- Fredrickson, B. L. (2001). The role of positive emotions in positive psychology: the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions. *American psychologist*, 56 (3), 218.
- Nationaal Regieorgaan Onderwijsonderzoek (2021). Solution room studenten en docentenwelzijn. Opgehaald via: <https://www.onderwijskennis.nl/artikelen/solution-room-studenten-en-docentenwelzijn>.
- Stallman, H. M. (2010). Psychological distress in university students: a comparison with general population data. *Austral. Psychol.* 45, 249-257. doi: 10.1080/00050067.2010.482109
- Versteeg, M. & Kappe, F.R. (2021). Studentenwelzijnsmonitor. Lectoraat Studiesucces. Haarlem: Hogeschool Inholland.