Part-time education experiences;
stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy
with regards to age, employment status,
and social-support.

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2. Abstract:

Student enrolment in third-level part-time courses in Ireland is increasing each year, yet research on their experiences is limited. The current research aimed to study stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy among part-time students with regards to their age, employment status and social support. A cross-sectional and correlational design with convenient sampling was employed and 103 part-time students responded to the questionnaire. The Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support, Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale 21 and The Coping Self-Efficacy Scale were used to gather self-report responses. The analyses indicate that age but not employment status, has a significant impact on stress and anxiety levels. Age was also a significant predictor of stress and anxiety while social support was correlated to and a predictor of self-efficacy. The results imply that young part-time students in their 20’s are more vulnerable to high levels of stress and anxiety. Limitations and implications for future research were addressed.
2. Introduction:

Part-time education refers to third level education options that cater to generally mature students who are unable to pursue full-time education due to several reasons such as family commitments, work demands, or seeking a way out of unemployability (Butcher, 2015; Swain & Hammond, 2011; Wood & Cattell, 2014). Statistics from around the world reveal an increase in the number of enrolments in part-time education courses. In the USA, the National Centre for Education Statistics (NCES) noticed an increase of 15% in part-time enrolments between 2005 to 2015. In the UK (year 2013), part-time students accounted for 31% of enrolments in higher education and among those, 56% were mature students above the age of 30 (Wood & Cattell, 2014). In Canada, the statistics for the years 2011-2012 revealed that at least a third of students in higher education were part-time students (Lee, 2017). The trend has been similar in Ireland, where part-time enrolments have increased during the last ten years. In 2017, 37,633 students enrolled in third-level part-time courses (Higher Education Authority, 2016). According to Central Statistics Office, there was an increase of almost 9000 students in 2016, when 39,632 students enrolled in part-time courses compared to 31,354 students in 2006.

Despite the spike in number of part-time students enrolling each year in Ireland, research on this population has been limited. Most of the research on students focuses on the challenges faced by full-time students. The limited research that has looked at part-time students around the world has revealed that they have a higher attrition rate and feel a stronger sense of isolation compared to their full-time peers (Jacoby, 2015). A possible explanation is that many part-time students decide to re-enter higher education after they have started full-time employment and have significant relationships or dependents that need their time (Forbus, Newbold, & Mehta, 2011). Another explanation is that part-time students
are usually mature students whose main concerns revolve around academic aspects and the need for a work-life balance (Jolin, 2015; Lee, 2017; Taylor & House, 2010). Therefore, they face time constraints and life situations that are typically not faced by full-time students. All of these circumstances can fuel a feeling of being an outsider among part-time students and they feel like they are studying in an alien environment (Callender & Feldman, 2009).

Research suggests that part-time students’ expectations differ significantly from those of full-time students. This may be due to differences in age, employment status and social support, all of which have been shown to result in difference in levels of stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy (Forbus et al., 2011). Past research on full-time students and general population has indicated that these variables influence student motivation and academic achievement as well as self-efficacy, anxiety and stress levels among students (Chao, 2012; Chyung, 2007; Kumar, Sharma, Gupta, Vaish, & Misra, 2014; Mahmoud, Staten, Hall, & Lennie, 2012; Trouillet, Gana, Lourel, & Fort, 2009). It is important to ascertain whether similar trends in stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels exist among part-time student population. This research seeks to study these constructs in more detail so that the gaps in literature can be overcome.

2.1 Significance of Stress:

Academic life can be a source of stress for almost all students (Chao, 2012). Stress is described as a feeling of intense psychological pressure which is usually triggered due to adversely perceived aspects in a person’s environment (Taylor, 2017). Literature on student stress suggests that stress causing factors range from poor social support, inability to create a work-life balance, the anxiety associated with the demands of higher education, and poor time management to name a few (Chao, 2012; Taylor & Owusu-Banahene, 2010; Misra & McKean, 2000). Kudielka, Buske-Kirschbaum, Hellhammer, and Kirschbaum (2004), found
that younger adults responded more strongly to stress than their older counterparts, hinting at a decrease in HPA responsivity with age, therefore, indicating better coping mechanisms and lower stress levels. Similarly, Trouillet et al. (2009) found that a person’s coping/adaptive behaviour evolves across the lifespan, mainly due to the mediating effect of satisfaction with social support and perceived self-efficacy and stress. These patterns have also been observed in student populations across the world. A cross-sectional study of 892 medical students in King Saud university found that stress levels decreased significantly as academic years progressed. This may indicate that with age and experience there is an increase in self-efficacious beliefs that can lead to improved coping mechanisms and therefore, less levels of stress (Abdulghani, AlKanhal, Mahmoud, Ponnamperuma, & Alfaris, 2011). However, research by Forbus et al. (2011) suggests that in fact part-time mature students have higher levels of stress in comparison to their full-time younger counterparts. The results of their research demonstrate that more demands on time due to work and family constraints precipitate in higher stress levels among part-time students. This indicates that while coping mechanisms improve with age and aid in lowering stress, so do the demands on a person’s cognitive resources, which can counteract the moderating effects of coping and increase stress. One purpose of this research is to discern the influence of age, social support and employment status on stress.

2.2 Significance of Anxiety:

Anxiety among students is a well-known phenomenon and a subject of extensive research to date. Anxiety is a constant feeling of worry or fear that can persist for long periods of time and individuals who suffer from anxiety find it hard to relax, leading to long term adverse physical and psychological symptoms (Taylor, 2017). The drive for academic achievement is associated with excessive anxiety and interlinked with poor time
management, stress, and lower academic performance among students (Misra & McKean, 2000; Owens, Stevenson, Hadwin, & Norgate, 2012). Comparisons of part-time and full-time students around the world have reported higher levels of anxiety among the latter. Past research on students in Iceland has pointed out the higher prevalence of anxiety and its associated health problems in the full-time student population as compared to their part-time counterparts (Oddsson, 1984). Similarly, Stallman (2010) conducted a research that looked at 6479 students from two universities in Australia and found that in comparison with general population, their stress and anxiety levels were significantly higher. One of the factors pinpointed by her is the full-time status of many students along with monetary concerns and lack of experience due to their young age (Stallman, 2010). Lee (2017) on the other hand, claims that the unique circumstances that accompany part-time education may be a contributing factor to the feeling of anxiety that such students often develop. One such circumstance is low self-efficacy levels, which is a result of being out of touch academically as compared to traditional full-time students. Another circumstance is their relative inability to manage time due to demands placed on them from employers and families. This seems to suggest that contrary to past research, poor time-management is a better predictor of anxiety among part-time students as compared to a difference in age. The current research will try to establish whether anxiety is impacted by the mediating effects of age, employment status and social support.

2.3 Significance of Self-Efficacy:

Self-efficacy is an individual’s belief in their ability to cope with demanding/trying circumstances (Bandura, 1977). A positive sense of self-efficacy leads to a ‘Can-Do’ attitude towards life and has a strong impact on expectations, allocation of cognitive resources, motivation and life goals (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997; Schwarzer, 1992). Bandura (1997)
has emphasized the importance of experience with regards to self-efficacy and the accumulative effect it can have on one’s confidence levels. The feeling of personal control improves with more success in any domain, culminating in expectations of proficiency. Whereas repeated failure lowers the sense of personal control and proficiency, consequently creating negative associations with the task (Bandura, 1977). Such negative associations can lead to emotional arousal that triggers feelings of anxiety and stress, ultimately impacting task motivation performance negatively (Bandura, 1977; Bandura, 1997; Schwarzer, 1992). Research on the general population corroborates these claims. A study that looked at 568 participants from different occupations found that there was a positive relationship between social support, self-efficacy and overall life satisfaction (Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016). Self-efficacy was also found to be a mediator between social support and recovery among a sample of 250 participants with a history of mental illness (Thomas, Muralidharan, Medoff, & Drapalski, 2016).

Past and recent research suggests that self-efficacy has an impact on motivations, academic achievement as well as anxiety and stress. Self-efficacy beliefs were found to have a moderating effect on academic performance among low aptitude students (Brown, Lent, & Larkin, 1989). Low self-efficacy has been found to have a relationship with procrastination which is a significant source of academic anxiety and stress among student population (Haycock, McCarthy, & Skay, 1998). Self-efficacious students were seen to give preference to performance and demonstrated persistence, self-assurance and higher overall grades compared to low self-efficacy students who tended to believe in innateness of intelligence, suffered from more academic anxiety and generally avoided difficult tasks (Komarraju & Nadler, 2013). Bong and Skaalvik (2003) suggest that self-efficacy is a precursor to formation of self-concept. Healthy self-efficacious beliefs among students result in a positive self-concept that affects motivation, performance, and emotional responses such as stress and
anxiety. Furthermore, research also suggests that self-efficacy is mediated by age, social support and experience (Forbus et al., 2011; Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016). Therefore, based on previous research, the current study will try to determine if age, experience, and social support impact the psychological construct of self-efficacy.

2.4 Relevance of Age:

Adulthood is a somewhat elusive concept; a social construct that defines psychosocial growth and varies from society to society (Beck, 2016; Berger, 2017). The last 3 stages of Erikson’s 8 stages of psychosocial development deal with adulthood (Berger, 2017). His stages divide adulthood into young (20-45), middle (45-65) and Late adulthood (above 65) (Henig, 2010). Arnett (2000) on the other hand argues that the 20’s need to be recognised as a unique stage that should be labelled ‘Emerging Adulthood’. This period is marked by self-exploration, self-discovery, a desire to be independent, and a feeling of hope intermixed with a fear of future (Arnett, 2000; Beck, 2016). He describes the 30’s as ‘Young Adulthood’; the transitory period between emerging adulthood and adulthood, when self-concept is more whole and stability in life is not a novelty. This stage is often seen as the right one for settling down and starting a family (Arnett, 2000). Recent marriage trends in Ireland and across the world reflect this description of young adults. Statistics reveal that the average age of Irish women and men at marriage is now 33 – 35 years and 35 - 36 years respectively (Duffy, 2017; Hilliard, 2017). The 40’s then, is the period of ‘Adulthood’, marked by a well-defined personality, clearly outlined life goals, higher chance of self-actualisation and stable relationships. Most people at this stage have a definite career path, a dependable job and families (Arnett, 2000; Beck, 2016).

Since most part-time students around the world are mature students (Daly, 2015; Lee, 2017; Wood & Cattell, 2014), it can be assumed that the mediating factors of age and self-
efficacy will impact their stress and anxiety levels (Forbus et al., 2011). For many of them, the prospect of going back to education can be intimidating as entering education after an academic break entails rusty skills. They may suffer from self-doubt, isolation and a feeling of being an outsider in their own academic institute (Jacoby, 2015; Lee, 2017; Mooney, 2015). At the same time, the presence or absence of social support is known to impact feelings of well-being (Cutrona, Cole, Colangelo, Assouline, & Russell, 1994). And this support fluctuates due to differences in age (Arnett, 2000). This research predicts that different age groups will reveal significant differences in the anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy levels of part-time students. Keeping the above research on adulthood in mind, the current research will divide the variable of age into three subgroups:

1. Up to 30 years old.
2. 30-39 years old.
3. 40 years and older.

2.5 Influence of Employment Status:

Research on full-time students indicates that almost 80% are employed during education (Riggert, Boyle, Petrosko, Ash, & Rude-Parkins, 2006). As has been discussed earlier, most part-time students are mature students who return to education due to reasons such as family commitments, personal satisfaction and workplace demands (Lee, 2017; Swain & Hammond, 2011; Wood & Cattell, 2014). Most part-time students cannot manage full-time education due to the fact that they are engaged in full-time employment (Forbus et al., 2011; Jolin, 2015). While some manage part-time jobs with their academic pursuits, there is also a small percentage of part-time students who come back to education because they are seeking employment, therefore, they lack the financial means to support the cost of education (Taylor & House, 2010). This situation is further exacerbated by the fact that most mature
students are not eligible for any college funded assistance either, so employment becomes a necessity (Daly, 2015).

Academic performance is strongly linked with self-efficacy beliefs which are known to influence a person’s anxiety and stress levels (Lee, 2017; Stallman, 2010). Previous research on full-time students has demonstrated that working hours impact students’ self-efficacy and over-worked students tend to have lower academic performance (Pritchard, 1996). Similarly, Elling and Elling (2000) found that the students who worked 30 hours or more reported a negative impact on their mental health and academic performance due to work, as compared to students who worked less or not at all. On the other hand, relatively recent research on undergraduate students suggests that students who work 10-19 hours per week tend to have higher academic performance, compared to students who work more hours or not at all (Dundes & Marx, 2006). Betzold (2013) argues that students who work full-time fare worse than students who work part-time, simply because the former has far less time to focus on their studies. A recent study that looked at nursing students in Colombia supports the previous research. It was found that students who were working 20 or more hours in paid employment showed a noticeable negative impact on their academic performance (García-Vargas, Rizo-Baeza, & Cortés-Castell, 2016). For the current research, it is assumed that employment status will result in similar differences in self-efficacy, stress and anxiety of part-time students. For this research, the variable of employment will be further divided into two sub-groups;

1. Unemployed and Part-time Employed; since the number of part-time students who are either unemployed or part-time employed is low (Gil, 2014; Lee, 2017), they have been grouped together to achieve adequate numbers in the sub-group.

2. Full-time Employed.
2.6 Significance of Social Support:

Social support is an important psychological construct in psychology. Healthy/strong social support has been shown to act as a buffer for negative feelings and has been linked to lower levels of anxiety, stress and depression (Wongpakaran, Wongpakaran, & Ruktrakul, 2011; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). Lin (1986) defined it as the, “Perceived or actual instrumental and/or expressive provisions supplied by the community, social networks and confiding partners” (p. 18) (Lin, as cited in Zimet et al., 1988). Early research on social support implies that poorly perceived social support is linked to poor mental health. Lakey and Cassady (1990) suggest that social support is a cognitive construct that operates as a cognitive function of perceived support. They found that students who perceived their social support levels as low were also prone to perceive any new support system with suspicion and hostility. Similarly, Cutrona et al. (1994) looked at parental social support in a group of 418 students. The results revealed that perceived parental social support was a predictor for higher average grades. Especially noteworthy were reassurances of worth from parents. Ozbay et al. (2007) argue that social support is even instrumental in achieving and maintaining physical health. They suggest that social support may play a role in boosting resilience to environmental vulnerabilities and genetic predispositions to mental health problems.

Recent cross-cultural research on full-time students indicates similar patterns for social support. Positive social support has been found to shield college students with suicidal ideation from impact of stressful social interactions (PhD & PhD, 2011). Social support, specially parental, was found to be a significant predictor of well-being among students in Iran, Jordan and USA (Brannan, Biswas-Diener, Mohr, Mortazavi, & Stein, 2013). While most researchers emphasize the role played by attitude and self-efficacy in assuring academic achievement, according to Rice et al. (2013) the role of social support in this regard should
not be undermined. The results of their vast cross-sectional study of 5th grade to early college students reveal that students who perceived higher social support from three domains (parents, friends, teachers), reported healthier attitudes and higher levels of self-efficacy. This indicates that social support can improve student motivation and ultimately academic performance. Research on traditional and mature students reveals that presence of strong/stable relationships in life can be a source of social support and research has shown that it helps to counter feelings of alienation, leading to higher retention and lower levels of anxiety and stress (Wilcox, Winn, & Fyvie- Gauld, 2005; Wong & Kwok, 1997). Keeping this past research in mind, it is expected that social support will be a predictor of stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy levels among part-time students in this research as well.

2.7 Current Study:

The current study will look at the stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy levels among part-time students with regards to their age, employment status and social support. The central aim of this study is to determine if the anxiety and stress levels of part-time students differ because of differences in age and employment status. Another aim of this study is to determine whether age and employment status make a difference in self-efficacy levels. This research will also try to ascertain whether social support has any relationship, negative or positive, with stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy. Furthermore, this research seeks to establish whether social support in conjunction with age and employment status, mediates the relationship between stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy.

Research in the past has mostly focused on the impact of these variables on full-time students. Factors affecting anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy among part-time students the world over have not received a lot of attention. Therefore, data on part-time students is limited at best. As more students enrol in part-time education in Ireland every year, it is very
important that researchers look at their mental health issues and challenges. The scarcity of research on part-time students in Ireland means that there is very little insight into the problems and challenges faced by them. Meaningful change and help is only possible when their issues are well-understood. Keeping the past research in mind, this research will test the following hypotheses to fill the gaps left in part-time education literature:

1. It is hypothesized that the stress levels among part-time students will differ significantly in relation to their employment status (Unemployed and Part-time Employed, Full-time Employed).

2. It is hypothesized that the anxiety levels among part-time students will differ significantly in relation to their employment status (Unemployed and Part-time Employed, Full-time Employed).

3. It is hypothesized that the self-efficacy levels among part-time students will differ significantly in relation to their employment status (Unemployed and Part-time Employed, Full-time Employed).

4. It is hypothesized that stress among part-time students will differ significantly between different age groups (Up to 30 years old, 31-39 years old, 40 years and older).

5. It is hypothesized that anxiety among part-time students will differ significantly between different age groups (Up to 30 years old, 31-39 years old, 40 years and older).

6. It is hypothesized that coping self-efficacy among part-time students will differ significantly between different age groups (Up to 30 years old, 31-39 years old, 40 years and older).

7. It is hypothesized that perceived social support will have a significant positive correlation with coping self-efficacy.

8. It is hypothesized that perceived social support will have a significant negative correlation with stress.
9. It is hypothesized that perceived social support will have a significant negative correlation with anxiety.

10. It is hypothesized that perceived social support, employment status and age will predict the levels of stress among part-time students.

11. It is hypothesized that perceived social support, employment status and age will predict the levels of anxiety among part-time students.

12. It is hypothesized that perceived social support, employment status and age will predict the levels of coping self-efficacy among part-time students.
3. Methods

3.1 Participants:

A total of 103 part-time third-level students from various courses agreed to take part in this study (70 females/33 males). All participants were consenting adults and the majority (70) were recruited from within the premises of Dublin Business School via convenience sampling. The rest (33) were recruited online via means of snowball sampling method on social media and through links posted on Dublin Business School student website. The average age of the participants was 35 years old with a standard deviation of 9.19 and a range of 20 – 61 years old. Participation was voluntary, and all the participants consented to take part in the study. No incentives were used to influence their decision. Dublin Business School Ethics committee approved the study and ensured that all the ethical professional principals were adhered to.

3.2 Design:

This study adopted a quantitative, cross-sectional, within-subjects and correlational design aspect. The variables for the cross-sectional design in this study are;

*Dependent Variables:* Stress, Anxiety, and Self-Efficacy.

*Independent Variables:* Age and Employment status. The variable of age was divided into three levels; Up to 30 years old, 31-39 years old, 40 years and older. The variable of employment status was divided into two levels; Unemployed and Part-time Employed, Full-time Employed.

The variables for the correlational design are:

*Criterion:* Stress, Anxiety, and Self-Efficacy

*Predictor:* Age, Employment Status and Perceived Social Support.
3.3 Materials:

Dublin Business School ethics committee approved both the printed questionnaire and the online survey. The cover sheet on the printed booklet and the first section of the online survey asked for consent and demographic questions about gender, age, education status, employment status and the number of working hours in a week (Appendix 1). The online survey had an additional question asking about the participant’s current education status to establish their part-time status. Rest of the demographic questions and the questionnaires were same as the printed survey.

3.3.1 Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS):

The first self-report measure to be used was the Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988) (Appendix 2). This short scale measures participants’ levels of perceived social support. It can be further divided into three subscales that measure sources of support from Family, Friend and Significant others. For this research, the subscales were not used as separate measures, rather the total subjective score was used. It contains 12 items that are assessed on a 7-point Likert scale. The responses range from 1 (Very Strongly Disagree) to 7 (Very Strongly Agree). Example of questions on the scale include, ‘My family really tries to help me’ and ‘I have friends with whom I can share my Joys and Sorrows’. The total score for each participant needs to be divided by 12 to get the accurate mean scores. The scores on the scale range from 1-7 and according to Zimet et al. (1988) a score of 1 - 2.9 means low support, a score of 3 - 5 means moderate support and a score of 5.1 – 7 indicates high support.

The scale has good internal reliability and validity. Zimet et al. (1988) reported a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .88 for the complete scale and reported a good test-retest
reliability value as well (.85). Furthermore, they demonstrated a good construct validity by highlighting the correlations between MSPSS scores and depression and anxiety scores in their study, which strengthens their prediction that social support is inversely related to depression and anxiety. The three subscales had similarly high values; Significant other (.91), Family (.87), Friends (.85). Zimet, Powell, Farley, Werkman, and Berkoff (1990) tested the scale on three different populations (pregnant women, adolescents, and paediatric residents in training) and obtained a Cronbach’s Alpha value range of .84 - .92. Wongpakaran et al. (2011) tested the Thai version of MSPSS on a population of 462 Thai participants and obtained a high Cronbach’s Alpha value of .91, and a negative correlation with anxiety and depression, indicating that the scale has good reliability and validity across different populations and cultures.

3.3.2 Depression, Anxiety and Stress Scale (DASS 21):

The second self-report questionnaire in the study measures levels of depression, anxiety, and stress (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995). DASS21 is the shortened version of DASS42 questionnaire (Appendix 3). Since this study measured only anxiety and stress, the answers for the depression scale were not included in the research. The 7-item subscale of anxiety measures situational anxiety and autonomic arousal among others and contains statements like, ‘I was aware of dryness of my mouth’ and, ‘I felt I was close to panic’. The 7-item subscale of stress measures nervous arousal and difficulty relaxing among others and includes statements like, ‘I felt that I was using a lot of negative energy’ and, ‘I found myself getting agitated’. The 14 statements had 4 Likert scale responses ranging from 0 = ‘Did not apply to me at all’ to 3 = ‘Applied to me very much, or most of the time’. The scoring for stress and anxiety ranges from 0 – 34+ and 0-20+ respectively. The scores are further
subdivided into five categories ranging from mild (0-14 and 0-7) to extremely severe (34+ and 20+).

Brown, Chorpita, Korotitsch, and Barlow (1997) tested DASS 21 on a large clinical sample (678) and obtained Cronbach’s Alpha values of .89 and .93 for anxiety and stress respectively. Henry and Crawford (2005) used a confirmatory factor analysis (CFA) and obtained a Cronbach’s Alpha value of .82 for the anxiety scale and .90 for the stress scale. A Vietnamese version of DASS21 was used for screening of mental health issues among 221 young mothers in Vietnam (Tran, Tran, & Fisher, 2013). Results of the study reveal moderate to high internal consistency for stress and anxiety (.70 and .77) and highlight the cross-culture validity of the scale as well.

3.3.3 Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSE):

The third self-report questionnaire of the survey measures a person’s confidence in their ability to cope with difficult circumstances (Appendix 4). The 26 items in the CSE scale are scored on an 11 point Likert scale with a range of 0 – 10 (zero = ‘Cannot do at all’, five = ‘Moderately certain can do’ and ten = ‘Certain can do’) (Chesney, Neilands, Chambers, Taylor, & Folkman, 2006). Each participant is asked, ‘When things aren’t going well for you, or when you’re having problems, how confident or certain are you that you can do the following’. And their responses are measured for statements such as, ‘look for something good in a negative situation’, and, ‘get emotional support from family and friends’ (Chesney et al., 2006). The questionnaire can be further divided into three subscales, ‘use problem-focused coping’, ‘stop unpleasant emotions and thoughts’, and, ‘get support from friends and family’. High scores indicate high self-efficacy. For this study, the total score of the scale was used to measure overall coping self-efficacy of the participants.
Research in the past found the internal consistency and test-retest reliability of a reduced form of the scale for three factors to be strong with Cronbach’s Alpha values of .91, .91, and .80 for the three subscales and a total value of .95 (Chesney et al., 2006). The test-retest reliability values remained almost similar on subsequent follow up assessment conducted by Chesney et al. (2006). Colodro, Godoy-Izquierdo, and Godoy (2010), found that the scale demonstrates reliability and construct validity. Their research yielded high values of Cronbach’s Alpha for the total scale (.94), as well as high values for the three subscales (.91, .91, and .85).

3.4 Procedure

After gaining approval from the ethics committee, the online survey link was shared on social media, the online student resource page of Dublin Business school (DBS) and the Facebook page of DBS Psychological Society. Most of the participants were recruited from part-time courses after seeking prior permission from the course lecturers via email. Upon entering the classrooms, the participants were informed verbally about the nature of the study and their right to consent, leave the survey incomplete in case they don’t want to answer a question or withdraw at any time before final submission. They were also assured that their participation will be completely anonymous at all times and no identifying information was collected. Furthermore, they were told that the survey will not take more than 10-12 minutes to complete. After handing out the survey to each participant, they were requested to fill out their demographic details and the questionnaires to the best of their knowledge. The debrief sheet and contact details of the Aware and Samaritan support groups were provided at the end of the survey, in case any questions caused unpleasant or difficult emotions in any of the participants (Appendix 5). The participants were thanked for their contribution once the
completed surveys were collected. The data from the online survey and the printed survey was downloaded and coded respectively into SPSS version 24 for statistical analysis.
4. Results

4.1 Descriptive Statistics:

Demographics:

Out of 103 participants, 68% were females (70) and 32% were males (33). The average age (M) of the participants was 35.21 (SD = 9.20). The youngest participant was 20 years old and the oldest was 61 years old. Most of the participants were 29 years old (10.7%). The descriptive statistics for demographic data are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics of Demographics

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<td>35.21</td>
<td>9.20</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>61</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Further analysis revealed the percentage of participants in the group variables (see Table 2). For the Age Groups variable, 35% participants responded to the ‘Up to 30 years old’ group, 37.9% to the ‘31-39 years old’ group and 27.2% responded to the ‘40 years and older’ group. For the Employment Status variable, 35.9% responded to the ‘Unemployed and Part-time Employed’ group, while 64.1% responded to the ‘Full-time Employed’ group. The most participants were in the ‘31-39 years old’ and the ‘Full-time Employed’ groups.

Table 2: Descriptive Statistics for Groups

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Percentage</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 30 years old</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>35%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-39 years old</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>37.9%</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years and older</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>27.2%</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
The descriptive statistics for the three psychological measures used are shown in Table 3. The mean score for MSPSS, Anxiety, Stress and CSE was 5.57 (SD = 1.07), 10.78 (SD = 10.44), 16.64 (SD = 10.05) and 162.47 (SD = 47.89) respectively. The minimum and maximum scores on each scale and the range of scores is also shown in the Table 3.

### Table 3: Descriptive Statistics of Psychological Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Mean</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Minimum</th>
<th>Maximum</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSPSS</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>5.57</td>
<td>1.07</td>
<td>1.33</td>
<td>7.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety (DASS21)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>10.78</td>
<td>10.44</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress (DASS21)</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>16.65</td>
<td>10.05</td>
<td>.00</td>
<td>40.00</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>103</td>
<td>162.47</td>
<td>47.89</td>
<td>38</td>
<td>260.00</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Finally, all the items in the psychological measures were tested for their internal reliability in SPSS (see Table 4). The Cronbach’s Alpha values for all the measures used indicate a high score. This verifies the internal reliability of the measures used as evidenced by research in the past.

### Table 4: Reliability of Psychological Measures

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Measure</th>
<th>No. of Items</th>
<th>Cronbach’s Alpha</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>MSPSS</td>
<td>12</td>
<td>.92</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Anxiety (DASS21)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Stress (DASS21)</td>
<td>7</td>
<td>.89</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>CSE</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>.96</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
4.2 Inferential Statistics:

One of the aims of this study was to determine whether differences in age and employment status result in differences in levels of anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy (CSE). A simple comparison of mean scores revealed that these differences exist across age and employment status groups. Table 1 represents the breakdown of mean and standard deviation (SD) scores of participants in the independent variables of Age and Employment Status groups for the dependent variables of Anxiety, Stress and Coping Self-efficacy (CSE).

Table 1: Comparison of Mean (M) and Standard deviation (SD) scores on Psychological measures across group variables of Age and Employment Status.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable Groups</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>Anxiety M (SD)</th>
<th>Stress M (SD)</th>
<th>CSE M (SD)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Age Groups</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Up to 30 years old</td>
<td>36</td>
<td>15.39 (12.52)</td>
<td>22.12 (9.53)</td>
<td>148.23 (49.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>31-39 years old</td>
<td>39</td>
<td>9.90 (8.95)</td>
<td>14.62 (9.85)</td>
<td>167.54 (46.80)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>40 years and older</td>
<td>28</td>
<td>6.08 (6.61)</td>
<td>13.15 (7.09)</td>
<td>173.72 (43.85)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Employment Status</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Unemployed/PT Employed</td>
<td>37</td>
<td>11.68 (11.74)</td>
<td>16.33 (9.45)</td>
<td>165.81 (44.45)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Full-time Employed</td>
<td>66</td>
<td>10.28 (9.70)</td>
<td>17.13 (10.05)</td>
<td>160.60 (49.95)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*PT = Part-time

4.2.1 Independent Samples T-Test:

Hypotheses 1, 2 and 3 state that there will be significant differences in the stress, anxiety and coping self-efficacy levels of part-time students due to differences in their employment status (Unemployed and Part-time employed, Full-time Employed). The participants in the ‘Unemployed and Part-time Employed’ group display slightly higher levels of anxiety (M = 11.68, SD = 11.74) and self-efficacy (M = 165.81, SD = 44.45) and slightly lower levels of stress (M= 16.33, SD = 9.45) as compared to participants in the ‘Full-time Employed’ group (see Table 1). Independent samples t-tests results for these hypotheses indicate that there are no significant differences in the Anxiety (t(101) = .66, p = .52, CI
(95%) -2.87 – 5.67), Stress (t(101) = -.40, p = .70, CI (95%) -4.75 – 3.16) and Coping self-efficacy levels (t(101) = .53, p = .60, CI (95%) -14.36 – 24.80) of part-time students due to differences in their employment status. Therefore, the null could not be rejected.

4.2.2 One Way Between Groups Analysis of Variances (One Way ANOVA):

Hypotheses 4, 5 and 6 state that Stress, Anxiety and Self-efficacy will differ significantly between different age groups (Up to 30 years old, 31-39 years old and 40 years and older). The results of a One-Way ANOVA do not support hypothesis 6. A one-way analysis of variances showed that the self-efficacy levels do not differ significantly between the three age groups (F (2, 100) = 2.67, p = .074). Therefore, the null could not be rejected.

The results of a One-Way ANOVA support hypothesis 4. A one-way analysis of variances showed that stress levels differed significantly between the three age groups (F (2, 100) = 9.60, p < .001). Due to unequal group sizes Gabriel post hoc analysis was used and it revealed that Up to 30 years old group had significantly higher stress levels than the 31–39 years old group (Mean Difference = 7.50, p = .002, CI (95%) 2.42, 12.58) and the 40 years and older group (Mean Difference = 8.97, p < .001, CI (95%) 2.44, 14.50). This shows that the younger age group has significantly higher levels of stress as compared to the older groups (see Figure 1 and 2).

The results of a One-Way ANOVA support hypothesis 5. The Levene’s test for homogeneity of variances was significant (p = .001), therefore a Welch test was used, and results show that anxiety levels differed significantly between the three age groups (F (2, 65.26) = 7.56, p = .001). More specifically, Games-Howell post hoc analyses reveal that Up to 30 years old group has significantly higher anxiety levels compared to 40 years and older group (Mean Difference = 9.32, p = .001, CI(95%) 3.47, 15.18). This shows that the younger
age group has significantly higher anxiety levels compared to the older age group (see Figure 3 and 4).

Figure 1: Means Plot Between Stress Scores and Age groups.

Figure 2: Bar Graph of mean Stress scores and Age Groups
Figure 3: Means Plot between Anxiety scores and Age groups.

Figure 4: Bar Graph of mean Anxiety scores and Age Groups
4.2.3 Correlations:

Hypotheses 7, 8 and 9 state that perceived social support will have a significant positive correlation with coping self-efficacy and a significant negative correlation with stress and anxiety. Pearson’s Correlation Coefficients were performed to test the relationships between these variables and the results do not support hypotheses 8 and 9. No significant relationships were found between perceived social support and stress ($r(100) = -0.04$, $p = .76$), and perceived social support and anxiety ($r(100) = -0.05$, $p = .63$). Therefore, the null could not be rejected.

The results support hypothesis 7. A Pearson’s Correlation Coefficient found that there was a moderate positive significant relationship between perceived social support ($M = 5.61$, SD = .99) and coping self-efficacy ($M = 162.47$, SD = 47.89) ($r(100) = .38$, $p < .001$). The results reveal that increase in social support relates to an increase in coping self-efficacy level. This relationship accounts for 14.50% of variation of scores (see Table 2).

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Variable</th>
<th>Total Coping Self-Efficacy</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Perceived Social Support</td>
<td>.38**</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

**Correlation is significant at the .01 level (2-tailed).

4.2.4 Multiple Regressions:

Hypotheses 10, 11 and 12 state that perceived social support, employment status and age will predict levels of stress, anxiety and coping self-efficacy among part-time students and the results support the hypotheses.

Multiple regression was used to test whether perceived social support, employment status and age will predict levels of stress among part-time students. The results of the regression indicated that the three predictors explained 13% of the variance ($R^2 = .13$, F(3,
It was found that age significantly predicted stress levels among part-time students ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = -.62 - -.23).

Multiple regression was used to test whether perceived social support, employment status and age will predict levels of anxiety among part-time students. The results of the regression indicated that the three predictors explained 13% of the variance ($R^2 = .13$, $F(3, 98) = 5.85, p = .001$). It was found that age significantly predicted anxiety levels among part-time students ($\beta = -.39$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = -.66 - -.24).

Multiple regression was used to test whether perceived social support, employment status and age will predict levels of self-efficacy among part-time students. The results of the regression indicated that the three predictors explained 21% of the variance ($R^2 = .21$, $F(3, 98) = 9.77, p < .001$). It was found that social support significantly predicted self-efficacy levels among part-time students ($\beta = .38$, $p < .001$, 95% CI = 9.81 - 26.89) as did age ($\beta = .30$, $p = .001$, 95% CI = .61 - 2.48). Social support was the stronger predictor of self-efficacy levels among part-time students.
5. Discussion

The main purpose of this research was to look at the stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy levels among part-time students with regards to their age, employment status and social support in order to fill the existing gaps in literature on part-time students. The first goal of this research was to determine if differences in employment status made a significant difference in the levels of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy of part-time students. Another goal of this research was to establish whether differences in age resulted in significant differences in the stress, anxiety and self-efficacy of part-time students. The third goal of this research was to ascertain whether perceived social support had a significant negative relationship with stress and anxiety and a significant positive relationship with self-efficacy. Finally, this research sought to demonstrate whether the mediating variables of perceived social support, age and employment status can predict the levels of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy among part-time students. Overall, there is mixed support for the research hypotheses. The main results of this study indicate that age has a clear impact on the stress and anxiety levels of part-time students. While social support was found to influence self-efficacy levels. There was no difference observed in stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels due to differences in employment status.

5.1 Key findings and link to previous literature:

There was no support for the 1st, 2nd and 3rd hypotheses i.e. no significant differences were found in the stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels of part-time students due to their employment status (Unemployed/Part-time Employed and Full-time Employed). This suggests that employment status does not have a noticeable influence on the feelings of stress, anxiety or self-efficacy of part-time students. These findings are contrary to past
research which has indicated that longer working hours such as those experienced by full-time employed students, have a detrimental effect on students’ feelings of anxiety, stress, and self-efficacy (Betzold, 2013; Elling & Elling, 2000; García-Vargas, Rizo-Baeza, & Cortés-Castell, 2016; Pritchard, 1996). The higher stress mean score of the Full-time Employed group support research by Forbus et al. (2011) which suggests that part-time students are more exposed to stressful situations due to demands of the workplace. However, generally the mean scores for the Full-time Employed group do not reveal any clear patterns and slight differences in levels of anxiety and self-efficacy are negligible. One possible explanation for this can be the part-time student status of both groups. It may indicate that both groups experience similarly demanding academic environments, therefore, similar levels of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy.

Results of the current study indicate that a difference in age makes a difference in the levels of stress and anxiety, but it has no impact on levels of self-efficacy. There was support for hypotheses 4 and 5, i.e. a difference in age of part-time students effects their levels of stress and anxiety. There was no support for hypothesis 6, i.e. differences in age makes no significant difference in the levels of self-efficacy of part-time students. This is contrary to previous findings on self-efficacy, which suggest that self-efficacious beliefs improve with age and accumulative experience (Bandura, 1997; Forbus et al., 2011; Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016). It is possible that such a difference is not obvious in the current research because of the use of a scale that measures general or overall self-efficacy, instead of academic self-efficacy specifically. The results of hypotheses 4 and 5 support past research on the topic. The Up to 30 years old group reported the highest levels of stress and anxiety, while the 40 years and older group reported the lowest levels of stress and anxiety. The 31 – 39-years old group was in the middle score range. Generally, the 20’s are regarded as a time of self-discovery marked with uncertainty due to a fear of future (Arnett, 2000). This can
explain the high anxiety and stress levels among the younger group of participants. It indicates that with age, coping mechanisms improve and this precipitates in lower levels of stress and anxiety, which is also in line with past research on coping and self-efficacy (Abdulghani et al., 2011; Gayathri & Karthikeyan, 2016). Neuroscience also supports this notion, as older adults have been found to have lower hypothalamic drive in response to stress inducing stimuli. This lower drive results in less reactive responses to stress, therefore indicating that coping mechanisms improve with age. This will explain why the 40 years and older group reports the lowest anxiety and stress scores.

There was partial support for the relationship between perceived social support, anxiety, stress and self-efficacy. There was no support for hypotheses 8 and 9, which suggests that perceived social support of part-time students has no relationship to their levels of stress and anxiety. This contradicts past research on impact of social support which has suggested that social support acts as a buffer against negative emotions, thus shielding students from excessive feelings of stress and anxiety (PhD & PhD, 2011; Wongpakaran et al., 2011; Zimet, Dahlem, Zimet, & Farley, 1988). A possible explanation for this can be that participants in this study are mature students who may not have the same access to parental support as younger students. As research by Brannan et al. (2013) indicates, parental support is a significant predictor of feelings of well-being in young college students. There was a moderate positive significant relationship between perceived social support and self-efficacy which supports the 7th hypothesis. Strong social support has been linked to positive attitudes about studies and high levels of self-efficacy in students, especially in subjects of science and maths (Rice et al., 2013). This suggests that high levels of perceived social support have a correlation with moderately high levels of self-efficacious beliefs among part-time students and is in line with previous research. One explanation for this relationship between social support and self-efficacy might be that most mature students tend to be in stable, long-term
relationships (Forbus et al., 2011), which can be a reliable source of encouragement and self-efficacious beliefs.

The multiple regression model used to test hypotheses 10, 11 and 12 employed perceived social support, age and employment status as predictors of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels. The results support the hypotheses i.e. perceived social support, age and employment status are predictors of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels of part-time students. More specifically, age was found to be a significant predictor of stress and anxiety levels while social support was found to be a significant predictor of self-efficacy. Age was found to have a moderate negative correlation with stress and anxiety and a moderate positive correlation with self-efficacy. There is support for these findings in past research. Trouillet et al. (2009) suggest that a person’s coping mechanisms evolve with age and experience. This implies that an increase in age corresponds with an increase in levels of self-efficacy, consequently leading to a decrease in levels of stress and anxiety. Similarly, Kudielka et al. (2004) reported that younger adults respond more strongly to stress compared to older adults. Perceived social support was found to have a moderate positive correlation with self-efficacy as well. These results are in line with previous literature which reveals that the mediating effects of age counter the feelings of stress and anxiety among students (Abdulghani et al., 2011; Stallman, 2010).

5.2 Strengths and Limitations:

A significant strength of this study is that it looks at experiences of part-time students in Ireland. Research on part-time students around the world is limited, and even though HEA reports an increase in number of part-time students each year, there is hardly any research that deals with part-time students in Ireland. Each country has a unique academic environment and approach to student support services. Research on part-time students in
Ireland can contribute towards highlighting their problems areas and it can help student support services to cater to their needs. Another strength of this study is its robust design that incorporates cross-sectional as well as correlative design aspects. The study incorporates strong statistical analysis which allows for a thorough testing of the variables, ensuring in the process that important associations and correlations are accounted for. The breakdown of the age variable into 3 categories that separate emerging adults from young adults and adults is another strength of this study. It allows for the student population to be categorised clearly and also gives an idea about which age group is more prevalent in the part-time student population.

There are some weaknesses and limitations of the present study. Most of the participants are from Dublin Business School. This is problematic as it limits the sample to a very specific population and may not be representative of the student populations elsewhere. It would have been better if the current study had moved its scope beyond one university. Such a scenario would have countered the second limitation of this study; sample size. While 103 participants are an adequate sample size, statistical tests like Anova and Multiple Regression report more robust results when sample size is larger. A larger sample size can also deal with the issue of missing values and outliers in the data. Another limitation of this study is the lack of any qualitative design elements. A question inquiring about the students’ perception of their own experiences may reveal invaluable insight about their feelings and should be considered for future research on part-time students. Finally, the use of self-report questionnaires is problematic. It is possible that responses indicated by students merely reflect their emotions on that day, therefore distorting the results. One way to counter that can be the use of longitudinal design that looks at the levels of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy among the same participants after a period of few weeks or month to get a clearer picture of their state of mind.
5.3 Implications and Future Directions:

The current research has important implications for future research despite the limitations. The results clearly indicate that age is a factor in determining levels of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy. Specifically, the results imply that younger students are at more risk of developing mental health issues that are triggered by high levels of anxiety and stress. The predictive value of age and social support is noteworthy in this regards and future research ought to study these constructs via a qualitative design, for e.g. an interview format to shed light from a different and more personal perspective. The current study suggests that high levels of social support correlate with levels of self-efficacy, especially in conjunction with age. This entails that if younger students have access to dependable social support, it can counter the mediating effect of lack of experience due to age and improve student retention rates. This is particularly relevant with regards to international students. Each year international students leave their familiar social support networks behind to pursue higher education. The unavailability of social support, especially parental support in their adopted environment can have serious consequences and further research can look at what this unavailability entails for international students.

5.4 Conclusion:

In conclusion, the findings of the current study indicate that differences in age, rather than employment status result in differences in stress and anxiety. There was no significant effect of age or employment status on the self-efficacy levels of part-time students. The results suggest that part-time students in their 20’s tend to suffer from higher stress and anxiety levels, compared to their older counterparts in the 30’s and 40’s. Self-efficacy was found to have a significant relationship with perceived social support and higher levels of
social support positively correlate with higher levels of self-efficacy. The variables of age, employment status and social support have been found to be a predictor of stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels of part-time students. The variable of social support was found to be a significant predictor of self-efficacy, while age was found to be a significant predictor for anxiety and stress. These findings are in line with previous research and suggest that age, followed by social support, has a significant impact on stress, anxiety and self-efficacy levels of part-time students. It is important to study these construct in part-time students in depth so areas where they face serious challenges can be located and meaningful help can be offered to those who are most in need of it. This will have a positive impact on retention rates for part-time students in future.
References


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https://doi.org/10.3102/00346543076001063


Appendices

**Appendix 1: Information Sheet**

**Part-time education experiences; stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy with regards to age, employment status and social-support.**

**Information sheet:**

My name is Farah Imran and I am a student of part-time Higher Diploma of Psychology year 2. I am conducting research in the Dublin Business School’s Department of Psychology that explores stress, anxiety, and self-efficacy in part-time students with regards to their experiences with age, employment status, and social support. This research is being conducted as part of my final year thesis and will be submitted for examination. After submission, I will also present a poster of my research within the premises of Dublin Business School.

You are invited to take part in this study and participation involves completing this anonymous survey. The survey will not take more that 10-12 minutes to complete. If you don’t want to answer any question, feel free to leave it unanswered. While the survey asks some questions that might cause some minor negative feelings, it has been used widely in research previously. If any of the questions do raise difficult feelings for you, contact information for support services are included on the final page.

Participation is completely voluntary, and you are not obliged to take part. You may withdraw from the study at any time before submitting the answers. Participation is anonymous and confidential. Thus, responses cannot be attributed to any one participant. For this reason, it will not be possible to withdraw from participation after you have submitted your answers.

It is important that you understand that by completing and submitting the questionnaire that you are consenting to participate in the study. Should you require any further information about the research, please contact me on _________ My supervisor can be contacted at _________

Thank you in advance for taking the time to complete this survey.

**Required**

Do you consent to participate in this research? *

- Yes
- No

__________________________________________________________________________
Demographic Questions

- Which gender do you identify with?
  __________________
- What age are you?
  _____________

Please select the option that applies to you.

- What is your job status?
  1. Unemployed
  2. Part-time employed
  3. Full-time employed
  4. Other
    _________________

- Number of hours of paid work in a week:
  _____________

Appendix 2: Multidimensional Scale of Perceived Social Support (MSPSS) (Zimet et al., 1988)

Instructions: We are interested in how you feel about the following statements. Read each statement carefully. Indicate how you feel about each statement.

Circle the “1” if you Very Strongly Disagree

Circle the “2” if you Strongly Disagree

Circle the “3” if you Mildly Disagree

Circle the “4” if you are Neutral
Circle the “5” if you **Mildly Agree**

Circle the “6” if you **Strongly Agree**

Circle the “7” if you **Very Strongly Agree**

1. There is  

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

   a

   special

   person

   who is

   around

   when I

   am in

   need.

2. There is  

   1  2  3  4  5  6  7

   a

   special

   person

   with

   whom I

   can

   share

   my joys

   and

   sorrows.
3. My family really tries to help me.

4. I get the emotional help and support I need from my family.

5. I have a special person who is a real source of comfort to me.
6. My friends really try to help me.

7. I can count on my friends when things go wrong.

8. I can talk about my problem with my family.

9. I have friends with
whom I can share my joys and sorrows.

10. There is a special person in my life who cares about my feelings.

11. My family is willing to help me make decisions.
I can talk about my problem s with my friends.

Appendix 3: Depression Anxiety and Stress Scale 21 (DASS21) (Lovibond & Lovibond, 1995).

DASS21

Please read each statement and circle a number 0, 1, 2 or 3 which indicates how much the statement applied to you over the past week. There are no right or wrong answers. Do not spend too much time on any statement.

The rating scale is as follows:

0 Did not apply to me at all
1 Applied to me to some degree, or some of the time
2 Applied to me to a considerable degree or a good part of time
3 Applied to me very much or most of the time
1 (s) I found it hard 0 1 2 3 to wind down

2 (a) I was aware of 0 1 2 3 dryness of my mouth

3 (d) I couldn’t seem 0 1 2 3 to experience any positive feeling at all

4 (a) I experienced 0 1 2 3 breathing difficulty (e.g. excessively rapid breathing, breathlessness in the absence of physical exertion)

5 (d) I found it 0 1 2 3 difficult to work up the initiative to do things
6 (s) I tended to over-react to situations

7 (a) I experienced trembling (e.g. in the hands)

8 (s) I felt that I was using a lot of nervous energy

9 (a) I was worried about situations in which I might panic and make a fool of myself

10 (d) I felt that I had nothing to look forward to

11 (s) I found myself getting agitated

12 (s) I found it difficult to relax
13 (d) I felt down-hearted and blue
14 (s) I was intolerant of anything that kept me from getting on with what I was doing
15 (a) I felt I was close to panic
16 (d) I was unable to become enthusiastic about anything
17 (d) I felt I wasn’t worth much as a person
18 (s) I felt that I was rather touchy
19 (a) I was aware of the action of my heart in the absence of physical
exertion (e.g. sense of heart rate increase, heart missing a beat)

20 (a)  I felt scared  0  1  2  3
without any good reason

21 (d)  I felt that life  0  1  2  3
was meaningless

**Appendix 4:** Coping Self-Efficacy Scale (CSE) (Chesney, Neilands, Chambers, Taylor, & Folkman, 2006)

When things aren't going well for you, or when you're having problems, how confident or certain are you that you can do the following. Please rate on a scale from 0 to 10, where 0 – cannot do it at all and 10 – certainly can do.

For each of the following items, write a number from 0 – 10 next to the statement

When things aren't going well for you, how confident are you that you can:

1.  Keep from getting down in the dumps.
2.  Talk positively to yourself.
3.  Sort out what can be changed, and what cannot be changed.
4.  Get emotional support from friends and family.
5. Find solutions to your most difficult problems.
7. Leave options open when things get stressful.
8. Make a plan of action and follow it when confronted with a problem.
9. Develop new hobbies or recreations.
10. Take your mind off unpleasant thoughts.
11. Look for something good in a negative situation.
12. Keep from feeling sad.
13. See things from the other person's point of view during a heated argument.
14. Try other solutions to your problems if your first solutions don’t work.
15. Stop yourself from being upset by unpleasant thoughts.
17. Get friends to help you with the things you need.
18. Do something positive for yourself when you are feeling discouraged.
19. Make unpleasant thoughts go away.
20. Think about one part of the problem at a time.
21. Visualize a pleasant activity or place.
22. Keep yourself from feeling lonely.
23. Pray or meditate.
24. Get emotional support from community organizations or resources.
25. Stand your ground and fight for what you want.
26. Resist the impulse to act hastily when under pressure.
Appendix 5: Debrief Sheet and Support Group Information

Thank you for your answers. Your response has been recorded.

If you feel that answering this survey has raised some issues for you, please consider contacting some of the support services listed below, or speak to a friend, family member or professional.

Aware:
The Aware Support Line 1890 303 302
Available Monday – Sunday, 10am to 10pm.
Email for support at: supportmail@aware.ie

Samaritans
Call on: 116 123
Available 24hrs a day, 365 days a year. Free to call.
Email: jo@samaritans.org