



## RESEARCH ARTICLE

# Stress and Well-being among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations: The Mediating Role of Grit

Vaishnavi Tripathi, Sadhana Yadav\*, Pinki Gautam, Neha Mishra

## Abstract

The present study aims to identify how grit mediates the relationship between stress and well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations. The study employed a quantitative correlational design. A convenient sampling method was used, and 300 aspirants preparing for NEET, JEE, and Civil Services, age-ranging between 18-35 years, were selected as participants for this study. In the present study, Life Stress Scale developed by Kumar (2002) was used to measure the level of stress. The Well-being Index developed and standardized by Chauhan and Sharma (2016) was used to examine the participants' level of well-being, while the Short Grit Scale developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009) was used to identify their level of grit. Correlational analysis revealed that a significant negative relationship exists between stress and well-being ( $r = -.597, p < 0.01$ ) and stress and grit ( $r = -.330, p < 0.01$ ) a significant positive relationship exists between grit and well-being ( $r = .338, p < 0.01$ ). Mediation Regression Analysis showed that grit partially mediates the relationship between stress and well-being. The study attempts to understand the correlation between stress and well-being, as well as the role grit plays between them in high-pressure academic environments and emphasizes the need for institutional support to mitigate its effects.

**Keywords:** Stress, Well-being, Grit, Aspirants, Competitive Examinations, NEET, JEE, Civil Services

## Introduction

The relationship between stress, grit, and well-being is highly significant in the context of aspirants of competitive examinations. This is so because this group constantly faces intense competition, fear of failure, uncertainty, elongated study hours, anxiety related to the future, and social comparison (Ramteke et al., 2025; Kolay & Simon, 2023). Stress has become a common experience for the aspirants preparing for various competitive examinations like SSC, UPSC, JEE, NEET, banking, etc. However, all aspirants are not affected equally (Gupta, 2021). Some aspirants continue to work hard despite challenges; on the other hand, others may

experience a decline in their emotional stability, consistency, and motivation (Duckworth et al., 2007). And here, grit appears to be an important psychological construct.

Stress is usually considered an emotional or mental state that arises when an individual feels that there is an imbalance between the demands placed on them and their coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In the context of aspirants, stress is not just the pressure of academic study but it also involves situations of uncertainty, repeated failures, financial as well as societal pressure, peer comparison, parental expectations, and insecurity related to the future. When an individual faces a high level of stress for a long period of time, it can give rise to various problems like emotional exhaustion, self-doubt, difficulty in concentration, mental fatigue, and hopelessness. This condition may gradually begin to affect the aspirants' consistency of preparation and psychological functioning (Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

In such situations, many aspirants may find it difficult to maintain consistency and perseverance towards their goal. They can repeatedly doubt their own capabilities and become emotionally detached from preparation itself. This can weaken their commitment to long-term goals. And at this point, grit plays an essential role. It is a personality trait that helps an individual maintain consistency and

Department of Psychology, JDGPGC, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India

**\*Corresponding Author:** Sadhana Yadav, Department of Psychology, JDGPGC, Chhatrapati Shahu Ji Maharaj University, Kanpur, India, E-Mail: sadhanayadav42@gmail.com

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persistence towards long-term goals (Duckworth et al., 2007). With regard to aspirants, grit does not only mean working hard but also maintaining consistency for a long period of time, continuing efforts regardless of repeated failure, ignoring distractions, and remaining committed to goals even after delayed success. Such individuals perceive setbacks as temporary (Duckworth et al., 2007).

In this study, grit has been taken as a mediator because it is necessary to understand how stress indirectly impacts well-being. It is not enough to know that increased levels of stress result in decreased well-being, but it is also crucial to understand the changes that occur within the individual during this process. The increased stress among aspirants of competitive examinations leads to reduced perseverance, goal commitment, and sustained motivation (Seligman, 2011; Duckworth et al., 2007). It means that stress can adversely impact an individual's level of grit. In such circumstances, individuals may feel mentally exhausted, psychologically dissatisfied, and emotionally unstable. Aspirants may begin to lose their sense of control, meaning, and achievement in the preparation phase. As a result, their well-being may begin to suffer.

In contrast, if an aspirant has enhanced levels of grit, then he/she can maintain their efforts consistently, even under stressful conditions. Such aspirants do not perceive failures as the ultimate limit of their capabilities but rather consider them as learning experiences or opportunities. This can help in strengthening a sense of purposefulness, emotional balance, and self-confidence, ultimately helping in maintaining well-being. Therefore, grit can help understand why stress does not affect everyone equally (Duckworth et al., 2007; Credé et al., 2017). For some individuals, well-being remains comparatively stable despite stress because they remain persistent and consistent toward their goals (Duckworth et al., 2007; Seligman, 2011).

Well-being involves a positive mental state where an individual experiences emotional stability, life satisfaction, self-acceptance, a sense of purpose, and positive psychological functioning (Ryff, 1989). It is of great importance for aspirants of competitive examinations, because if an individual is not mentally balanced during their preparation phase, then his/her interpersonal relationships, motivation, and academic functioning may begin to suffer. Long periods of increased stress and reduced grit can ultimately lead to frustration, anxiety, psychological dissatisfaction, and loneliness, resulting in poor well-being (Duckworth et al., 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2016).

Previous studies have established a significant negative relationship between stress and well-being (Yadav et al., 2023; Bansal et al., 2021; Strizhitskaya et al., 2019). In a similar way, grit has been shown to be linked with academic success, high persistence, and better psychological adjustment (Duckworth et al., 2007). However, most of the studies have used grit as a moderator, identifying the extent

to which grit mitigates or amplifies the effects of stress. And very few studies have tried to understand grit as a mediator, specifically with regard to aspirants of competitive examinations. Therefore, the present study tries to fill this research gap by examining the way stress impacts grit and, in turn, the well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations.

### ***Mediating role of Grit***

Lee et al. (2024) revealed that grit partially mediates the relationship between academic self-efficacy and school performance among high school students. Hong (2024) concluded that grit mediates the relationship between depression and academic helplessness among adolescent girls, indicating that grit serves as a buffer against emotional as well as motivational deficits. Koç and Gökalp (2023) found that self-control positively predicts grit, with academic motivation and attention control work as mediators, ultimately supporting the view that grit is related to other self-regulatory constructs that are necessary for school success. Tanrıverdi and Çelik (2022) demonstrated that both academic self-efficacy and grit mediate the relationship between psychological need satisfaction and academic success among students of university, which suggests that these constructs jointly decrease the emotional burden of academic demands. Similarly, Liu and Xue (2022) suggested that grit acts as a mediator in the relationship between mindset and academic burnout, supporting the view that grit buffers against cognitive and emotional exhaustion. Rachmahana et al. (2025) revealed that subjective well-being has a positive association with social support and resilience, whereas it has a negative association with stress. Additionally, resilience may play a mediating role in the impact of social support and stress on subjective well-being. Obeng et al. (2025) showed that grit acts as a mediator in the relationship between academic resilience and academic well-being among college students. Knauff et al. (2026) found that individuals with increased grit-perseverance experience decreased levels of perceived stress, ultimately leading to improved health-related quality of life. Thus, a lot of studies have been carried out where grit has been taken as a moderator in comparison to grit as a mediator. And even if Grit has been examined as a mediator—specifically between various psychological variables—very little research has been conducted on Grit acting as a mediator between stress and well-being variables. This is particularly true in the context of a sample comprising aspirants, where such research is extremely scarce—to the point of being almost negligible. It is precisely to address this research gap that we have undertaken this study.

### ***The Present Study***

The present study, grounded in the Stress and Coping Theory (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984) and Positive Psychology

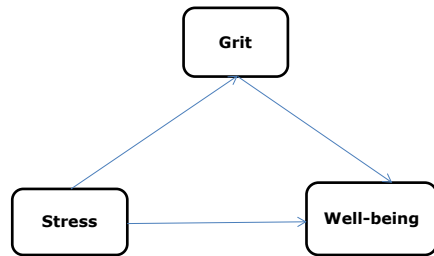


Figure 1: Model of the study

Framework, and with the support of the previous studies, aims to identify the mediating role of grit in the relationship between stress and well-being (Figure 1). The present model aims to contribute towards a new theoretical perspective in understanding the factors influencing well-being, and, on the basis of the empirical evidence, it encourages practical ways in which well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations can be improved. Stress may affect aspirants' well-being directly as well as indirectly through grit. Increased stress can weaken perseverance, sustained effort, and motivation toward long-term goals, thereby lowering grit. In turn, decreased grit may contribute to poorer well-being among aspirants.

### Objectives of the Study

In view of the gaps in the available review of literature following objectives have been formulated:

- To identify the relationship between stress and well-being.
- To examine the relationship between grit and well-being.
- To find out the relationship between stress and grit.
- To find out the mediating role of grit in the relationship between stress and well-being.

### Hypotheses of the Study

On the basis of the available literatures, following hypotheses were formulated:

H1: There would be a significant negative correlation between stress and well-being.

H2: There would be a significant positive correlation between grit and well-being.

H3: There would be a significant negative correlation between stress and grit.

H4: Grit would significantly mediate the relationship between stress and well-being.

## Materials and Methods

### Participants

The sample of 300 aspirants preparing for NEET, JEE, and Civil Services aged between 18 to 35 years were selected for the present study. The convenient sampling method was

used to select the participants for the study. Sample was specifically drawn from cities of Lucknow, Kanpur, Varanasi, Allahabad, and Patna. They were selected on the basis of their accessibility and availability. Ethical considerations were rigorously maintained throughout the present study. Before data collection, informed consent was obtained from all the participants of the study. Anonymity as well as confidentiality was maintained.

## Measures

### Life Stress Scale

The Life Stress Scale was developed by Kumar (2002). The scale was used in the present study to measure the level of stress among participants. It consists of 26 items in Hindi language. Each statement includes four options. The participants were required to select the most suitable option, out of four options, ranging from not at all (1) to very much (4). Higher scores on the scale indicate increased level of stress among participants and vice-versa. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be 0.91 (by researcher).

### Well-being Index

Well-being Index was developed and standardized by Chauhan and Sharma (2016). It involves 50 items in Hindi language. Among these 50 items, 32 are positive and 18 are negative. Each item consists of five options, ranging from never (1) to always (5). The index measures well-being among participants of 18 and above age. It shows how satisfied a person is with different aspects of life. The index consists of 6 dimensions including, emotional well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, spiritual well-being, self-awareness, and physical well-being. High scores on the scale indicate high levels of well-being and vice-versa. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be 0.89 (by researcher).

### Short Grit Scale

The Short Grit Scale was developed by Duckworth and Quinn (2009). Hindi version of the scale was prepared by the researcher using translation-back-translation method (Brislin, 1970). It contains 8 statements. The scale involves five point rating scale ranging from very much like me (1) to not at all like me (5). It includes two domains namely, consistency of interests and persistence of efforts. High scores on the scale represent great endurance for long-term goals. The scale possesses good psychometric properties. The Cronbach's alpha of the scale was calculated to be 0.71. To ascertain the validity, content validity and face validity were ensured through expert judgments.

## Results

SPSS version 20 and Hayes macro PROCESS v4.2 were used for the analysis of the obtained data. Mean, standard deviation, Pearson's Correlation Coefficient, and mediator

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics and correlation between measures (n = 300)

| Variables  | Mean   | S. D. | 1       | 2       | 3       |
|------------|--------|-------|---------|---------|---------|
| Stress     | 53.93  | 14.29 | -       | -.330** | -.597** |
| Grit       | 27.67  | 4.62  | -.330** | -       | .338**  |
| Well-being | 172.83 | 18.32 | -.597** | .338**  | -       |

Note: \*\* $p < 0.01$

regression analysis were carried out. The Pearson's Correlation Coefficient was used in order to identify the relationship between the predictor and criterion variable. Hierarchical regression analysis was carried out in order to identify the relative contribution of predictor variable in the prediction of criterion variable. And, mediator regression analysis was used to examine the mediating role of grit in the relationship between stress (predictor variable) and well-being (criterion variable).

Table-1 indicates the mean, SD, and correlation scores between the measures. For Stress, mean was found to be  $M = 53.93$  and  $SD = 14.29$ . For Grit, mean was found to be  $M = 27.67$  and  $SD = 4.62$ . For Well-being, mean was found to be  $M = 172.83$  and  $SD = 18.32$ . The correlation analysis showed a significant negative relationship between stress and grit ( $r = -.330$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ), stress and well-being ( $r = -.597$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ) and a significant positive relationship between grit and well-being ( $r = .338$ ,  $p < 0.01$ ).

Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in order to identify the relationship of stress with well-being and its six dimensions including emotional well-being, psychological well-being, social well-being, spiritual well-being, self-awareness and physical well-being. Here, the demographic variables (age and gender) were entered in the first step of the regression equation to partial out their effects prior to entering stress. In the second step of the regression equation, stress as predictor variable was added. It has been found that significant negative relationship has been predicted between stress and well-being.

It is clear from Table 2 that stress accounted for 34.6% of variance in the explanation of total well-being ( $R^2$  change = .346,  $F$  change = 167.116,  $F = 62.588$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 19.0% variance in the explanation of emotional well-being ( $R^2$  change = .190,  $F$  change = 70.386,  $F = 24.848$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 27.1% variance in the explanation of psychological well-being ( $R^2$  change = .271,  $F$  change = 113.284,  $F = 40.927$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 25.9% variance in the explanation of social well-being ( $R^2$  change = .259,  $F$  change = 106.870,  $F = 39.116$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 12.0% variance in the explanation of spiritual well-being ( $R^2$  change = .120,  $F$  change = 43.699,  $F = 23.073$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ), 25.2% variance in the explanation of self-awareness ( $R^2$  change = .252,  $F$  change = 105.225,  $F = 40.350$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 20.9% variance in the explanation of physical well-being ( $R^2$  change = .209,  $F$  change = 81.046,  $F = 30.659$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) over and above the demographic variables. Altogether, the outcomes indicated

**Table 2:** Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Stress as Predictor and Well-being as Criterion among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

| Demographic Variables       | Criterion Variable (Well-being) |           |                          |           |                   |           |                      |           |                |           |                     |           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------------|-----------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|-----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|
|                             | Emotional Well-being            |           | Psychological Well-being |           | Social Well-being |           | Spiritual Well-being |           | Self-awareness |           | Physical Well-being |           |
|                             | Step-1                          | Step-2    | Step-1                   | Step-2    | Step-1            | Step-2    | Step-1               | Step-2    | Step-1         | Step-2    | Step-1              | Step-2    |
| Age                         | .102                            | .080      | .146                     | .120      | .145              | .120      | .224                 | .207      | .177           | .151      | .164                | .141      |
| Gender                      | -.034                           | -.036     | .029                     | .027      | .058              | .055      | .129                 | .127      | .074           | .071      | .031                | .028      |
| Predictor Variable (Stress) |                                 |           |                          |           |                   |           |                      |           |                |           |                     |           |
| $\beta$                     |                                 | -.436***  |                          | -.521***  |                   | -.509***  |                      | -.346***  |                | -.503***  |                     | -.458***  |
| Overall $R^2$               | .011                            | .201      | .023                     | .293      | .025              | .284      | .070                 | .190      | .038           | .290      | .028                | .237      |
| $R^2$ Change                | .011                            | .190      | .023                     | .271      | .025              | .259      | .070                 | .120      | .038           | .252      | .028                | .209      |
| F Change                    | 1.686                           | 70.386    | 3.455                    | 113.284   | 3.863             | 106.870   | 11.157               | 43.699    | 5.857          | 105.225   | 4.306               | 81.046    |
| F                           | 1.686                           | 24.848*** | 3.455                    | 40.927*** | 3.863             | 39.116*** | 11.157               | 23.073*** | 5.857          | 40.350*** | 4.306               | 30.659*** |

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$  df1 and 2 (step-1) – 5, 294 df1 and 2 (step-2) – 6, 293

that stress significantly negatively predicted difficulties at all dimensions of well-being, i.e., emotional well-being ( $\beta = -.436, p < 0.001$ ), psychological well-being ( $\beta = -.521, p < 0.001$ ), social well-being ( $\beta = -.509, p < 0.001$ ), spiritual well-being ( $\beta = -.346, p < 0.001$ ), self-awareness ( $\beta = -.503, p < 0.01$ ), physical well-being ( $\beta = -.458, p < 0.001$ ) and total well-being ( $\beta = -.589, p < 0.001$ ).

Thus, Hypothesis-1 that there would be a significant negative correlation between stress and well-being; was supported.

Then, Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in order to identify the relationship of grit and well-being. Here, the demographic variables (age and gender) were entered in the first step of the regression equation to partial out their effects prior to entering grit. In the second step of the regression equation, grit as predictor variable was added. It has been found that significant positive relationship has been predicted between grit and well-being.

It is clear from Table-3 that grit accounted for 10.6% of variance in the explanation of total well-being ( $R^2$  change = .106,  $F$  change = 36.902,  $F$  = 17.226,  $p < 0.001$ ), 06.1% variance in the explanation of emotional well-being ( $R^2$  change = .061,  $F$  change = 19.380,  $F$  = 7.653,  $p < 0.001$ ), 07.9% variance in the explanation of psychological well-being ( $R^2$  change = .079,  $F$  change = 26.054,  $F$  = 11.175,  $p < 0.001$ ), 05.7% variance in the explanation of social well-being ( $R^2$  change = .057,  $F$  change = 18.443,  $F$  = 8.874,  $p < 0.001$ ), 03.0% variance in the explanation of spiritual well-being ( $R^2$  change = .030,  $F$  change = 9.704,  $F$  = 10.890,  $p < 0.001$ ), 08.4% variance in the explanation of self-awareness ( $R^2$  change = .084,  $F$  change = 28.269,  $F$  = 13.686,  $p < 0.001$ ) and 12.7% variance in the explanation of physical well-being ( $R^2$  change = .127,  $F$  change = 18.187,  $F$  = 44.682,  $p < 0.001$ ) over and above the demographic variables. Altogether, the outcomes indicated that grit significantly positively predicted difficulties at all dimensions of well-being, i.e., emotional well-being ( $\beta$  = .247,  $p < 0.001$ ), psychological well-being ( $\beta$  = .282,  $p < 0.001$ ), social well-being ( $\beta$  = .240,  $p < 0.001$ ), spiritual well-being ( $\beta$  = .172,  $p < 0.001$ ), self-awareness ( $\beta$  = .290,  $p < 0.01$ ), physical well-being ( $\beta$  = .358,  $p < 0.001$ ) and total well-being ( $\beta$  = .327,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Thus, Hypothesis-2 that there would be a significant positive correlation between grit and well-being; was supported.

Furthermore, Hierarchical regression analyses were conducted in order to identify the relationship of stress and grit. Here, the demographic variables (age and gender) were entered in the first step of the regression equation to partial out their effects prior to entering stress. In the second step of the regression equation, stress as predictor variable was added. It has been found that significant negative relationship has been predicted between stress and grit.

**Table 3:** Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Grit as Predictor and Well-being as Criterion among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

| Demographic Variables     | Criterion Variable (Well-being) |          |                          |           |                   |          |                      |           |                |           |                     |           |                  |           |
|---------------------------|---------------------------------|----------|--------------------------|-----------|-------------------|----------|----------------------|-----------|----------------|-----------|---------------------|-----------|------------------|-----------|
|                           | Emotional Well-being            |          | Psychological Well-being |           | Social Well-being |          | Spiritual Well-being |           | Self-awareness |           | Physical Well-being |           | Total Well-being |           |
|                           | Step-1                          | Step-2   | Step-1                   | Step-2    | Step-1            | Step-2   | Step-1               | Step-2    | Step-1         | Step-2    | Step-1              | Step-2    | Step-1           | Step-2    |
| Age                       | .102                            | .086     | .146                     | .128      | .145              | .130     | .224                 | .213      | .177           | .158      | .164                | .140      | .194             | .173      |
| Gender                    | -.034                           | -.033    | .029                     | .030      | .058              | .059     | .129                 | .130      | .074           | .075      | .031                | .032      | .060             | .061      |
| Predictor Variable (Grit) |                                 |          |                          |           |                   |          |                      |           |                |           |                     |           |                  |           |
| β                         |                                 | .247***  |                          | .282***   |                   | .240***  |                      | .172***   |                | .290***   |                     | .358***   |                  | .327***   |
| Overall R²                | .011                            | .072     | .023                     | .102      | .025              | .083     | .070                 | .099      | .038           | .122      | .028                | .156      | .043             | .149      |
| R² Change                 | .011                            | .061     | .023                     | .079      | .025              | .057     | .070                 | .030      | .038           | .084      | .028                | .127      | .043             | .106      |
| F Change                  | 1.686                           | 19.380   | 3.445                    | 26.054    | 3.863             | 18.443   | 11.157               | 9.704     | 5.857          | 28.269    | 4.306               | 44.682    | 6.592            | 36.902    |
| F                         | 1.686                           | 7.653*** | 3.445                    | 11.175*** | 3.863             | 8.874*** | 11.157               | 10.890*** | 5.857          | 13.686*** | 4.306               | 18.187*** | 6.592            | 17.226*** |

\*\*\* $p < 0.001$  df1 and 2 (step-1) – 5, 294 df1 and 2 (step-2) – 6, 293

**Table 4:** Summary of Hierarchical Regression Analysis for Stress as Predictor and Grit as Criterion among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

| Demographic variables       | Criterion Variable (Grit) |           |
|-----------------------------|---------------------------|-----------|
|                             | Step-1                    | Step-2    |
| Age                         | .066                      | .050      |
| Gender                      | -.003                     | -.005     |
| Predictor Variable (Stress) |                           |           |
| $\beta$                     |                           | -.328***  |
| Overall $R^2$               | .004                      | .112      |
| $R^2$ Change                | .004                      | .107      |
| F Change                    | .649                      | 35.740    |
| F                           | .649                      | 12.397*** |

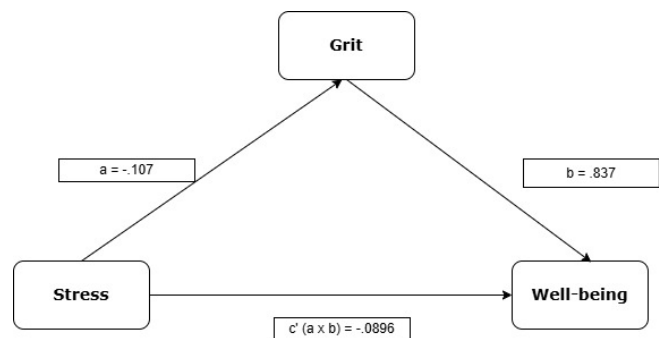
\*\*\* $p < 0.001$   $df_1$  and 2 (step-1) – 5, 294  $df_1$  and 2 (step-2) – 6, 293

It is clear from Table-4 that stress accounted for 10.7% of variance in the explanation of grit ( $R^2$  change = .107, F change = 35.740,  $F = 12.397$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ) over and above the demographic variables. Altogether, the outcomes indicated that stress significantly and negatively predicted grit ( $\beta = -.328$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ).

Thus, Hypothesis-3 that there would be a significant negative correlation between stress and grit; was supported.

Then, Mediator Regression analysis was carried out in order to identify the mediating role of grit in the relationship between stress and well-being. Here, stress was entered as predictor variable, well-being as criterion variable and grit as mediating variable in PROCESS Macro software.

Table 5 reveals the results of mediating effect of grit in the relationship between stress and well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations. The obtained results demonstrate that a significant negative relationship exists between stress and well-being, suggesting that increased level of stress results in poor well-being. Stress significantly predicts grit ( $\beta = -0.107$ ,  $SE = 0.017$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI: -0.141, -0.072). Similarly, grit significantly predicts well-being ( $\beta = .837$ ,  $SE = .257$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI: -.3312, 1.3432). The total effect of stress on well-being ( $\beta = 1.026$ ,  $SE = .0799$ ,  $p < 0.001$ ,

**Figure 2:** Mediating role of Grit in the relationship between Stress as Predictor and Well-being as Criterion among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

95% CI: -1.1841, -.8697), as was the direct effect of stress on well-being ( $\beta = -.9373$ ,  $SE = .0833$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI: -1.1012, -.7734). Further the indirect effect through grit showed that grit partially mediates the relationship between stress and well-being ( $\beta = -.0896$ ,  $SE = .0322$ ,  $p < 0.001$ , 95% CI: -.1591, -.0323).

Thus, Hypothesis-4 that grit would mediate the relationship between stress and well-being; was partially supported.

## Discussion

The purpose of the present study was to examine the mediating role of grit in the relationship between stress and well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations. In order to meet this objective, the study employed correlation, regression, and mediator regression analyses in order to identify the significant association between predictor and criterion variables. The obtained findings suggested that stress significantly predicted well-being and grit partially mediated this relationship among aspirants of competitive examinations.

The results indicated that a significant negative relationship exists between stress and well-being, suggesting that increased levels of stress result in poor levels of well-being. These results are inconsistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). This model suggests that the impact of stress depends on the individual's appraisal of the situation

**Table 5:** Summary of Mediator Regression Analysis between Stress as Predictor, Grit as Mediator and Well-being as Criterion among Aspirants of Competitive Examinations

| Predictor                                        | $\beta$   | SE    | t-value | P     | 95% CI  |        |
|--------------------------------------------------|-----------|-------|---------|-------|---------|--------|
|                                                  |           |       |         |       | LL      | UL     |
| Stress → Grit (a path)                           | -.107***  | .017  | -6.043  | <.001 | -0.141  | -0.072 |
| Grit → Well-being (b path)                       | .837***   | .257  | 3.255   | <.001 | .3312   | 1.3432 |
| Stress → Well-being Total effect (c path)        | -1.026*** | .0799 | -12.857 | <.001 | -1.1841 | -.8697 |
| Stress Direct effect (c' path)                   | -.9373*** | .0833 | -11.253 | <.001 | -1.1012 | -.7734 |
| Stress → Grit → Well-being Indirect Path (a x b) | -.0896    | .0322 | -2.782  | -     | -.1591  | -.0323 |

Abbreviations: CI- Confidence level, LL- Lower limit, UL- Upper limit

and the resources available to cope with it. On the basis of the present findings, those aspirants who perceive their situation as uncontrollable, their appraisal of the circumstance as a threat is enhanced. This long-term stress during their preparation phase elevates their affective states, specifically anxiety, irritability, and emotional exhaustion, ultimately leading to decreased well-being (Cohen et al., 2007). In addition, this prolonged stress has been found to be linked with various negative effects particularly anxiety and depressive symptoms (Kavakci et al., 2014; Prasad et al., 2022; Raman & Elakkiya, 2021). And during the preparation period, most of the aspirants often face external pressures from parents and society, which can adversely affect their well-being. Future studies can examine and identify various coping strategies that can be most effective for aspirants.

The obtained significant positive relationship between grit and well-being indicates that aspirants possessing increased levels of grit experience a relatively balanced mental state and better psychological functioning. These results are particularly significant in the contexts of long-term and high-stakes. Duckworth et al. (2007) revealed that people with enhanced levels of grit are more committed to long-term goals, which can help them maintain clarity related to their purpose and use their energy in a more structured manner. It can help individuals maintain meaningful engagement regardless of difficulties, allowing them to experience a sense of purpose and satisfaction in their endeavors. Such experience may contribute towards enhanced positive affect and life satisfaction. Thus, grit can not only help in enhancing performance but also enhance well-being. Grit may function as an effective performance-enhancing factor, fostering mental stability and well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations. In future, studies can identify various other psychological factors, namely family support and peer environment that affect the development of grit.

The obtained significant negative relationship between stress and grit suggests that aspirants with increased levels of stress possess decreased levels of grit. Although grit is considered a relatively stable personality trait, it is not entirely fixed and can be influenced by environmental and psychological factors such as chronic stress. Prolonged stress may lead to emotional exhaustion, reduced self-regulation, and feelings of discouragement, which can weaken the expression of grit in terms of perseverance, sustained effort, and consistency toward long-term goals. As a result, aspirants experiencing high stress may show lower levels of grit over time (Duckworth et al., 2007; Maslach & Leiter, 2016; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Harshini and Padmalakshmi (2025) have found similar results in their study and emphasized on the importance of developing grit among students in order to better able to cope with stress. Duckworth et al. (2007) suggested that grit can help individuals remain consistent

and persistent toward their long-term goals while also dealing effectively with challenges or hurdles. Therefore, fostering grit among aspirants can help them deal with challenges effectively while maintaining their focus on the goal. Future studies are needed that can adopt a qualitative approach in order to better understand the long-term benefits of grit in the practical world.

The findings of the study highlighted that grit partially mediated the relationship between stress and well-being among aspirants of competitive examinations. It signifies that stress not only directly affects the well-being among aspirants but also influences it indirectly through grit. Aspirants preparing for competitive examinations are often exposed to social pressure, fear of failure, long-term uncertainty, repeated setbacks, and academic overload. This continuous exposure to stress may gradually weaken their perseverance, sustained motivation, and consistent efforts towards their goals. When aspirants experience emotional exhaustion or discouragement, then their ability to persist regardless of challenges may get weak, ultimately leading to decreased levels of grit. This decreased grit, in turn, can adversely affect well-being. Aspirants possessing reduced perseverance and consistency towards goals are more prone to experience frustration, lower life satisfaction, hopelessness, and emotional instability during preparation phase. On the other hand, aspirants with enhanced grit tend to remain optimistic, determined, and self-disciplined despite stressful conditions, which helps them maintain their well-being.

The obtained partial mediation further indicates that grit does not fully explain the relationship between stress and well-being. Stress continues to exert a direct negative impact on well-being through emotional or psychological pathways like burnout, emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and sleep disturbance. However, grit serves as a crucial psychological mechanism through which some harmful effects of stress are transmitted.

The present findings are in line with perspectives of positive psychology, which emphasize that personal strengths, specifically resilience and perseverance, can affect how individuals psychologically respond to stressful experiences. With regard to competitive examinations, grit can help aspirants sustain long-term effort and remain psychologically engaged despite continuous challenges, obstacles or uncertainty.

These findings are of great importance for designing interventions, as it suggests that strengthening such traits can constitute an effective strategy. The broader implications of this study are crucial for educational, clinical and policy-level interventions. Various coaching institutes can adopt a holistic development model that incorporates robust mental health support systems along with academic rigor. Counseling services, peer-support groups and stress

management workshops should be institutionalized for aspirants of competitive examinations. Families should be also sensitized that increased pressure can negatively affect both the well-being and performance of aspirants. Interventions focusing on fostering grit, resilience and coping strategies can help decrease the negative impact of stress and improve well-being.

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