Levels of Perceived Stressful Life Events According to Selected Demographic Variables among Arab Residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

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Received on 17/5/2026 and accepted for publication on 29/6/2026
DOI: 10.60159/2467-004-008-007

Abstract: Considering the economic and social transformations occurring in several Arab countries, expatriates are increasingly exposed to social and economic stressors that may hinder their ability to adapt effectively, negatively affecting their psychological and social adjustment and overall well-being. The study's aim was to identify the Levels of Perceived Stressful Life Events According to Selected Demographic Factors among Arab Residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. The study adopted a descriptive approach (survey and comparative), as it is appropriate for the objectives of the study. The study sample consisted of 840 male and female participants from the Arab community in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with a mean age of 37.4 years and a standard deviation of 8.2. The Sources of Stressful Life Events Scale was used. Results: Overall stressful life events were found to be low, with a mean score of 2.39. Similarly, family, social, personal, and environmental stressors were at low levels, whereas work-related stressors were at a moderate level. The results also indicated statistically significant differences in perceived stress levels in favor of males. Significant differences were found among age groups in most stress dimensions, with the exception of personal stress. Significant differences were observed in family, social, environmental, work-related, and total stress at the 0.001 significance level, favoring the older age group. Furthermore, statistically significant differences were found among different educational levels across nearly all stress dimensions. Finally, statistically significant differences at the 0.001 level were found in environmental, family, and social stress in favor of unmarried individuals. The study recommends continuing efforts to enhance the quality of life and psychological well-being among residents through programs and initiatives that strengthen social support.
Keywords: Perceived Stress, Stressful life Events, Expatriates, Migrants, Demographic Factors.

مستويات إدراك أحداث الحياة الضاغطة في ضوء بعض المتغيرات الديموغرافية لدى المقيمين العرب بمدينة الرياض، المملكة العربية السعودية

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المستخلص: في ظل التحولات الاقتصادية والاجتماعية التي تشهدها عدة دول عربية، يتعرض المغتربون لضغوط اجتماعية واقتصادية متزايدة قد تحد من قدرتهم على التكيف الفعّال، بما ينعكس سلبًا على توافقهم النفسي والاجتماعي وجودة حياتهم. وهدفت الدراسة إلى الكشف عن مستويات إدراك الأحداث الحياتية الضاغطة في ضوء بعض المتغيرات الديموغرافية لدى المقيمين العرب في مدينة الرياض بالمملكة العربية السعودية. واعتمدت الدراسة المنهج الوصفي بشقيه المسحي والمقارن، لملاءمته لطبيعة أهدافها. وتكونت عينة الدراسة من (840) فرداً من الذكور والإناث من أفراد الجالية العربية المقيمة في الرياض، بمتوسط عمري بلغ (37.4) سنة، وانحراف معياري قدره (8.2). ولجمع البيانات، استُخدم مقياس مصادر الأحداث الحياتية الضاغطة. وأظهرت النتائج أن مستوى الأحداث الحياتية الضاغطة لدى أفراد العينة جاء منخفضًا بمتوسط حسابي بلغ (2.39). كما تبين انخفاض مستويات الضغوط الأسرية، والاجتماعية، والشخصية، والبيئية، في حين جاءت ضغوط العمل عند مستوى متوسط. وأسفرت النتائج عن وجود فروق ذات دلالة إحصائية في إدراك الضغوط تبعًا للجنس، وكانت في اتجاه الذكور. كما كشفت عن فروق دالة بين الفئات العمرية في معظم أبعاد الضغوط، باستثناء الضغوط الشخصية، حيث سجلت الفئة الأكبر سنًا مستويات أعلى في الضغوط الأسرية، والاجتماعية، والبيئية، وضغوط العمل، والضغوط الكلية. كذلك أظهرت النتائج فروقًا ذات دلالة إحصائية تعزى إلى المستوى التعليمي في معظم أبعاد الضغوط، إضافة إلى فروق دالة في الضغوط البيئية، والأسرية، والاجتماعية تبعًا للحالة الاجتماعية، وجاءت في اتجاه غير المتزوجين.

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وأوصت الدراسة بتعزيز البرامج والمبادرات الداعمة للمساندة الاجتماعية والرفاه النفسي، بما يسهم في تحسين جودة الحياة وتعزيز قدرة المغتربين على التكيف مع متطلبات البيئة التي يقيمون فيها.

الكلمات المفتاحية: الضغوط المدركة، أحداث الحياة الضاغطة، المغتربين، المهاجرين، العوامل الديموجرافية.

Introduction and theoretical background

Psychological stress has become one of the most prominent topics in contemporary psychological research because of its close association with mental health, psychological adjustment, and quality of life. Modern societies are characterized by rapid social, economic, technological, and cultural changes that continuously expose individuals to a wide range of demands and challenges. These changes have increased the likelihood of experiencing stressful life events that require continuous adaptation and effective coping strategies. (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

Psychological stress refers to the cognitive, emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses that arise when individuals perceive that environmental demands exceed their available coping resources. Rather than representing a single physiological reaction, psychological stress is now viewed as a multidimensional process involving exposure to stressors, subjective appraisal, and psychological and biological responses (American Psychological Association, 2023; Dorsey et al., 2022). Prolonged or chronic exposure to psychological stress has been consistently associated with anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, cardiovascular and metabolic disorders, impaired immune functioning, and reduced quality of life (Chu et al., 2024; Kivimäki et al., 2023). Consequently, contemporary stress research emphasizes that understanding stress requires considering both objective environmental demands and individuals' psychological responses to those demands.

Contemporary psychological literature distinguishes between stressful life events and the perception of stressful life events. Stressful life events refer to significant objective experiences or life changes such as bereavement, migration, unemployment, chronic illness, or major family transitions that require psychological and social adaptation (Carlson, 2024). In contrast, perceived stressful life events reflect an individual's subjective appraisal of these experiences and the extent to which they are considered threatening, uncontrollable, or overwhelming (Phillips, 2020). Contemporary stress theories maintain that the psychological consequences of life events depend less on the events themselves than on how individuals cognitively evaluate and interpret them in relation to their personal resources, previous experiences, and coping capacities (Dorsey et al., 2022). This perspective explains why individuals exposed to similar life circumstances often report markedly different levels of perceived stress. Therefore, measuring perceived stressful life events provides a more accurate representation of individuals' psychological experiences than merely documenting objective exposure to stressful life events, as it captures the interaction between environmental demands and cognitive appraisal (Cohen et al., 1983; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Dorsey et al., 2022).

Building on this conceptualization, contemporary stress research explains individual differences in the perception of stressful life events primarily through cognitive and resource-based frameworks. Cognitive Appraisal Theory posits that individuals first evaluate whether a life event represents a threat, challenge, or loss and then assess whether their available personal and environmental resources are sufficient to cope with its demands. Consequently, perceived stress is determined not by the objective characteristics of the event itself but by the outcome of this cognitive appraisal process, which subsequently shapes emotional, physiological, and behavioral responses (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984; Phillips, 2020). Complementing this perspective, Conservation of Resources Theory proposes that stress arises when individuals experience an actual loss of valued resources, anticipate such a loss, or fail to obtain expected resources following substantial investment. From this perspective, psychological resources, social relationships, financial security, and health function as protective assets that buffer the impact of stressful life events (Hobfoll et al., 2018).

Consistent with these theoretical perspectives, empirical research has demonstrated that the perception of stressful life events is influenced by a range of psychological and social resources. Individuals with higher levels of self-efficacy, psychological resilience, emotional regulation, and adaptive coping strategies generally report lower levels of perceived stress because they evaluate stressful situations as more manageable and controllable (Schäfer et al., 2022; Chu et al., 2024).

Likewise, social resources play an equally important role in shaping stress perceptions. Strong social support networks provide emotional reassurance, practical assistance, and a sense of belonging that buffer the adverse effects of stressful experiences, whereas loneliness, social isolation, and limited social support are consistently associated with higher perceived stress and poorer psychological adjustment (World Health Organization, 2022; Holt-Lunstad, 2024).

In addition to psychological and social influences, demographic characteristics have consistently been associated with individual differences in the perception of stressful life events. Contemporary evidence suggests that demographic variables shape both individuals' exposure to stressful experiences and their cognitive appraisal of those experiences, thereby influencing perceived stress (Dorsey et al., 2022; Yılmaz & Koğar, 2024).

Gender has been one of the most extensively investigated demographic variables in stress research. Numerous studies have reported that females generally exhibit higher levels of perceived stress than males, a pattern commonly attributed to greater emotional responsiveness, multiple caregiving responsibilities, and increased exposure to interpersonal stressors. However, recent systematic evidence indicates that gender differences are not always consistent and may diminish after accounting for occupational and socioeconomic conditions, suggesting that contextual factors contribute substantially to these differences (Fida et al., 2023; American Psychological Association, 2023).

Age has also been identified as an important determinant of perceived stress. Research consistently demonstrates that younger adults tend to report higher levels of perceived stress than older adults because they face multiple developmental transitions, educational pressures, career uncertainty, and financial instability. By contrast, older adults generally benefit from greater emotional regulation, accumulated life experience, and more adaptive coping strategies, which reduce the perceived impact of stressful life events (Chu et al., 2024; Ugwu & Idemudia, 2025).

Regarding marital status, empirical findings indicate that married individuals generally report lower levels of perceived stress than unmarried, divorced, or widowed individuals. This protective effect has been attributed to the availability of emotional intimacy, practical assistance, and social support within marital relationships, all of which facilitate coping with stressful life events. Nevertheless, recent reviews emphasize that the quality of the marital relationship, rather than marital status alone, is a critical determinant of stress perception, as distressed relationships may themselves become important sources of stress (Randall et al., 2023; World Health Organization [WHO], 2022).

With respect to educational level, most contemporary studies indicate that individuals with higher educational levels generally report lower levels of perceived stress because education enhances health literacy, problem-solving skills, cognitive flexibility, and access to socioeconomic resources that strengthen coping capacities. However, some studies have found that highly educated individuals may experience elevated stress owing to greater occupational demands and career expectations, indicating that the association between education and perceived stress varies according to social and occupational contexts (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development [OECD], 2023; Dorsey et al., 2022).

Expatriation and migration are widely recognized as major life transitions that require individuals to adapt to new social, cultural, occupational, and environmental contexts. Although migration may provide opportunities for personal and professional development, it is frequently accompanied by acculturative stress arising from separation from family, disruption of established social networks, language barriers, unfamiliar cultural norms, perceived discrimination, and uncertainty regarding employment and financial stability. These challenges increase the likelihood that migrants will perceive everyday life events as more stressful and psychologically demanding than non-migrant populations (Herold et al., 2024; Canova et al., 2024). Recent

systematic reviews further indicate that migration-related stress is strongly associated with anxiety, depression, psychological distress, reduced life satisfaction, and poorer psychological adjustment, particularly during the early stages of settlement in the host country (Herold et al., 2024; Nguyen et al., 2024).

Contemporary evidence also suggests that the impact of expatriation is moderated by demographic and social characteristics. Female migrants generally report higher levels of perceived stress than males because of greater caregiving responsibilities, social vulnerability, and exposure to discrimination, whereas younger migrants experience greater acculturative stress while establishing educational, occupational, and social roles in the host society. In contrast, marriage and strong family support appear to function as protective factors that facilitate psychological adjustment, whereas unemployment and limited social support increase vulnerability to stress-related mental health problems (Turnbull et al., 2023; Zabarra et al., 2024). These findings underscore that the psychological consequences of migration are shaped not only by migration-related experiences themselves but also by individual demographic characteristics and the availability of personal and social resources (Herold et al., 2024).

Furthermore, recent reviews emphasize that feelings of social isolation, loneliness, cultural alienation, and perceived discrimination are among the strongest predictors of perceived stress among expatriates and migrants. These experiences weaken migrants' sense of belonging, hinder successful acculturation, and increase the risk of anxiety, depression, and psychological distress. Conversely, supportive social relationships, cultural inclusion, and opportunities for meaningful community participation promote resilience and reduce the psychological burden associated with migration and expatriation (Nguyen et al., 2024; Amlashi et al., 2024).

Taken together, contemporary literature suggests that perceived stressful life events among expatriates are not determined solely by migration itself but emerge from the interaction between migration-related challenges, demographic characteristics, and the individual's cognitive appraisal and coping resources (Herold et al., 2024; Zabarra et al., 2024). This perspective provides a strong theoretical foundation for examining perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.

Saudi Arabia has become one of the world's leading destinations for expatriates, driven by sustained economic growth and large-scale development projects. According to the General Authority for Statistics (General Authority for Statistics [GASTAT], 2025), the Kingdom's population reached 35.3 million in 2024, including approximately 15.7 million non-Saudi residents (44.4% of the total population), who accounted for 75.6% of the population growth between 2023 and 2024. As the national capital and the country's principal administrative and economic center, Riyadh attracts a culturally diverse population of Arab residents who face continuous social, occupational, and cultural adaptation demands that may influence their perceptions of stressful life events.

Previous research has shown that perceived stressful life events are influenced by demographic characteristics, particularly gender, age, marital status, and educational level. However, despite the growing body of research on migrants and expatriates, limited attention has been given to Arab residents in Saudi Arabia and the combined influence of these demographic variables on perceived stressful life events.

Accordingly, the present study aims to examine the levels of perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh and investigate whether these levels differ according to gender, age, marital status, and educational level, with the central research problem framed as follows:

What are the Levels of Perceived Stressful Life Events According to Selected Demographic Factors among Arab Residents Living in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?"

Research Questions

1. What are the levels of perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?

2. Are there statistically significant differences in the levels of perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, according to the following demographic factors: gender, marital status, age, and educational level?

Method

Study Design

The researcher used the descriptive method (survey and comparative) to suit the study objectives. The descriptive method involves systematically analyzing and quantifying a phenomenon or problem through data collection, classification, and analysis (Malham, 2000). The comparative descriptive method compares groups on specific variables to identify differences (Obeidat, 2004).

Study population and Setting

The study population comprised Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia. Riyadh was selected because it is the capital and the largest administrative and economic center in the Kingdom, attracting a culturally diverse expatriate population from various Arab countries. According to the General Authority for Statistics (GASTAT, 2025), non-Saudi residents constitute 44.4% of the Kingdom's total population, highlighting the demographic significance of expatriate communities in Saudi Arabia. Data for the present study were collected from mid-October 2024 to the end of March 2025.

Study Sample

The study sample was selected using a convenience sampling method, which is classified as a non-probability sampling technique that involves selecting participants who are easily accessible and willing to take part, without ensuring equal selection probability for all members of the population (Etikan, 2016). According to Creswell and Creswell (2018), this type of sampling is commonly used in preliminary and exploratory research due to its efficiency in terms of time and resource utilization. Ethical approval was obtained from the participants, who consented to participate by completing a Google Form link shared via social media. Participation was entirely voluntary. Participants were also informed that they could withdraw from the study at any time without any penalty. Confidentiality was maintained using serial numbers to record the questionnaires

In the current study the research instruments were distributed to participants via Microsoft Forms links shared on social media platforms. The final sample consisted of (840) male and female respondents from the Arab community residing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, with a mean age of (37.4) years and a standard deviation of (8.2). The demographic characteristics of the sample are presented in Table (1).

Table 1 *Sample Characteristics (n=840)*

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Gender	Male	280	33%
	Female	560	67%
Educational Level	Secondary	490	58%
	Bachelor's degree	210	25%
	Graduate studies (master's & PhD)	140	17%
Age Groups	Less than 30 years	140	17%
	30–40 years	560	67%
	More than 40 years	140	17%
Marital Status	Married	668	80%
	Single	172	20%
Nationality	Egypt	294	35%
	Syria	151	18%
	Yemen	210	25%
	Jordan	50	6%
	Palestine	34	4%
	Sudan	101	12%

Variable	Category	Frequency	Percentage
Total		840	100%

Data Collection Tool

The study utilized the Stress Sources Input Form developed by Miller and Smith (1993) at the Boston University Medical Center. The original English version of the scale includes six subscales measuring the main sources of stress: family, social, personal, environmental, work-related, and academic stressors. The scale was translated into Arabic by Ali (2005) The construct validity coefficients for the scale items ranged from 0.309 to 0.820, indicating acceptable levels of internal consistency. The overall reliability coefficient of the scale reached 0.922, demonstrating a high degree of reliability.

The researcher re-developed and standardized the scale on a pilot sample consisting of (50) participants drawn from the study population. The validity and reliability indicators of the scale within the context of the current study are presented below. For the purposes of the current study, the academic stressors subscale was excluded due to its irrelevance, and the subscales became the focus of the research. (family= 10 items, social= 10 items, personal= 8 items, environment= 7 items, and work-related= 8 items). The final version of the scale comprised 43 items.

The scale is scored using a five-point Likert scale ranging from (1), representing "never applies," to (5), representing "always applies," with intermediate values indicating "applies to some extent," "sometimes applies," and "often applies." Response rates were calculated using the formula: item upper limit minus item lower limit divided by the number of response categories. Based on this formula, scale scores are interpreted as very low for scores below 1.8, low for scores from (1.8) to (2.6), moderate for scores from (2.61) to (3.41), high for scores from (3.42) to (4.22), and very high for scores above (4.22). This scoring procedure ensures a standardized interpretation of participants' responses across all subscales, providing a reliable measure of perceived stress levels among the Arab community residing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia

Validity and Reliability of the Tool

Content Validity: in the current study, the researcher verified the content validity of the scale by presenting it to a panel of (18)psychology specialists from university faculty members. Based on their evaluations, the agreement percentage for each item was calculated. Items that did not attain the minimum acceptable agreement level of (80%) were removed, while a number of items were modified in accordance with the experts' recommendations to enhance their wording, clarity, and relevance to the construct being measured.

Construct Validity was verified using the internal consistency method. According to Cronbach and Meehl, internal consistency is considered a form or alternative of construct validity (Farag, 1980, p. 314).

The internal consistency of the items and their dimensions was calculated using Pearson's correlation coefficient between each item score and its corresponding dimension, as well as the total score. The results are presented the item–dimension correlation coefficients ranged between (0.137–0.908), while the item–total correlations ranged between (0.119–0.775). All correlations were statistically significant at the (0.05) and (0.01) levels, The results indicated that the number of items with correlation coefficients lower than (0.30) with the dimensions was only (2) items, whereas (41) items exceeded this threshold. Regarding the item–total correlations, (3) items showed weak correlations, while (40) items demonstrated acceptable correlations. The items with low correlations were revised in the final version of the scale to enhance the internal construct validity. indicating a satisfactory level of internal consistency and construct validity of the scale.

Reliability: The reliability of the scale was verified by calculating Cronbach's alpha coefficients for each subscale as well as for the total scale score. The coefficients indicated high reliability, with family stressors at (0.920), social stressors; (0.769), personal stressors at (0.776), environmental stressors at 0.824, and work-related stressors at (0.942). The overall scale reliability was excellent at (0.957). According to George and Mallery (2003), Cronbach's alpha values above (0.8)are considered good, while values exceeding (0.9)are considered excellent.

These results confirm the scale's reliability and assure the researcher of the consistency of the findings.

Statistical Analysis

The Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) version 26 was used to analyze the gathered data. The data were coded, entered, and double-checked for outliers or errors. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests were made for normality. The Kolmogorov-Smirnov and Shapiro-Wilk tests revealed that all domains are not normally distributed as $p > 0.05$. Data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. In terms of descriptive statistics, the study variables were described using frequency, percentages, mean scores, and Standard Deviation (SD). The researcher assessed the normality of distribution using the Shapiro–Wilk test to examine the normality of distributions across different groups, as well as the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z test and Levene's test for homogeneity of variance. The results indicated statistical significance at a level below (0.05) for the variables (gender, age, educational level, and marital status), which led the researcher to employ non-parametric tests. Accordingly, the Mann–Whitney U test was used to examine differences between two groups (gender and marital status), while the Kruskal–Wallis's test was used to examine differences among more than two groups when analyzing the results of the second research question for these variables.

Results

Answering the First Research Question: What are the levels of perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia?

To answer the first research question, which asked, the weighted mean and standard deviation were calculated for each subscale of the stress measure, and their response categories were determined according to the scale scoring system. The results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 *"Means, Standard Deviations, and Response Categories for Life Event Stress Items, Subscales &, Total Score (n=840)*

Subscale	Item	Mean	SD	Response Category
Family Stressors	Overall	2.15	0.919	Low
	Death of a family member	3.75	1.69	High
	Conflicts with family	1.58	0.64	Very Low
	Illness of a family member	3.25	1.54	Moderate
	Divorce in the family	1.67	1.18	Very Low
	Addiction of a family member to alcohol or drugs	1.00	0.00	Very Low
	Expecting a new family member	2.42	1.85	Low
	Moving to a new house	2.67	1.97	Moderate
	Significant family income shortage	2.17	0.99	Low
	Beginning a new romantic relationship	1.00	0.00	Very Low
	Marital problems	2.00	1.23	Low
Social Stressors	Overall	2.37	1.589	Low
	Death of a close friend	1.75	1.09	Very Low
	Lack of social activity	3.00	1.29	Moderate
	Conflicts with neighbors	1.17	0.37	Very Low
	Leadership role in a group	2.83	1.63	Moderate
	Being excluded from close friends	2.67	1.49	Moderate
	Lack of human connection	2.50	1.32	Low
	Experiencing racial, religious, or class discrimination	2.17	1.46	Low
	Conflict between social life and work	2.58	1.66	Low
	Participation in a lawsuit	1.42	1.12	Very Low
	Concern about disease spread in community	3.58	1.71	High
Personal Stressors	Overall	2.31	0.979	Low
	Sexual difficulties	1.83	1.07	Low
	Change in personal habits	2.33	1.25	Low
	Weight issues affecting self-perception	2.67	1.38	Moderate
	Substance or alcohol use	1.00	0.00	Very Low
	Failure to balance personal goals and commitments	2.42	1.12	Low

Subscale	Item	Mean	SD	Response Category
Environmental Stressors	Emotional problems	1.17	0.37	Very Low
	Reduced quality of life	3.08	1.12	Moderate
	Traveling abroad for work	4.00	1.73	High
	Overall	2.57	0.975	Low
	Neighbor noise	1.58	0.64	Very Low
	Traffic congestion	2.75	1.59	Moderate
	Increase in daily noise levels	2.67	1.31	Moderate
	Lack of personal space	2.33	1.25	Low
	Frequent power outages	1.33	1.11	Very Low
	Air pollution	2.42	1.04	Low
	Water pollution	2.33	0.94	Low
	Overall	2.70	1.43	Moderate
Work Stressors	Leaving old job and starting a new one	1.83	1.52	Low
	Conflicts with supervisor	1.33	0.62	Very Low
	Fear of dismissal or layoff	2.58	1.50	Low
	Increased working hours or conditions	2.33	1.38	Low
	Increased work responsibilities	2.58	1.38	Low
	Perceived low quality of work	2.17	1.07	Low
	Pressure from work deadlines	3.00	1.53	Moderate
	Few opportunities for skill development	3.08	1.26	Moderate
Total Life Event Stress		2.39	1.55	Low

Table 2 shows the results presented indicate that the overall level of life event stress among the study participants was low, with a mean score of (2.39) and a standard deviation of (1.55), suggesting that the respondents generally did not experience high levels of life stress. Among the subscales, work stressors ranked first with a mean of (2.70), reflecting a moderate level of stress, followed by environmental stressors (M = 2.57), social stressors (M = 2.37), personal stressors (M = 2.31), and family stressors (M = 2.15). All subscales were classified as low except for work stressors, which fell within the moderate range.

Within the family stressors dimension, the most stressful event was the death of a family member (M = 3.75), which was rated as high, followed by the illness of a family member (M = 3.25), which was rated as moderate. In contrast, addiction of a family member to alcohol or drugs and beginning a new romantic relationship received the lowest mean scores (M = 1.00), indicating very low levels of stress.

Regarding social stressors, concern about the spread of disease in the community ranked highest (M = 3.58), representing a high level of stress, followed by lack of social activity (M = 3.00), which was rated as moderate. Conversely, conflicts with neighbors had the lowest mean score (M = 1.17), indicating a very low level of social stress.

For personal stressors, traveling abroad for work emerged as the most stressful event (M = 4.00), reflecting a high level of stress, followed by reduced quality of life (M = 3.08), which was rated as moderate. The lowest score was reported for substance or alcohol use (M = 1.00).

The findings related to environmental stressors showed that traffic congestion (M = 2.75) and increased daily noise levels (M = 2.67) were the most prominent environmental sources of stress, whereas frequent power outages received the lowest mean score (M = 1.33).

With respect to work stressors, which represented the highest-rated dimension overall, few opportunities for skill development ranked first (M = 3.08), followed by pressure from work deadlines (M = 3.00). In contrast, conflicts with supervisors received the lowest mean score (M = 1.33).

Overall, the findings suggest that the most influential sources of stress among the participants were associated with major life events, such as the death of a family member, traveling abroad for employment, concerns about disease outbreaks, and several work-related factors, particularly opportunities for professional development and deadline pressures. In

contrast, stressors related to severe family problems or substance-related issues appeared to have a very limited impact on the study participants.

Answering the Second Research Question: Are there statistically significant differences ($\alpha \leq .05$) in the levels of perceived stressful life events among Arab residents in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia, according to the following demographic factors: gender, marital status, age, and educational level?

First: Differences According to Gender

The researcher used the Mann–Whitney U test to examine differences between two independent groups according to gender. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z test indicated statistical significance at ($p = 0.001$), which reflects the non-normality of the distribution. Accordingly, the results are presented in Table (3).

Table 3 *Mann–Whitney U Test for Independent Samples Showing the Significance of Differences in the Study Sample's Responses According to Gender (n=840)*

Variables	Gender	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann–Whitney U	Significance
Family Stressors	Male	280	333.00	93240.00	53900	0.001
	Female	560	464.25	259980.00		
Social Stressors	Male	280	700.50	196140.00	15424	0.001
	Female	560	280.50	157080.00		
Personal Stressors	Male	280	490.50	137340.00	58800	0.001
	Female	560	385.50	215880.00		
Environmental Stressors	Male	280	464.25	129990.00	66150	0.001
	Female	560	398.63	223230.00		
Work Stressors	Male	280	551.75	154490.00	41650	0.001
	Female	560	354.88	198730.00		
Total Stress Score	Male	280	604.25	169190.00	26950	0.001

Table (3) show: The results of the Mann–Whitney U test revealed statistically significant differences at the (0.001) level between males (N = 280) and females (N = 560) across all stress dimensions and the total stress score. Family stressors were higher among females (mean rank = 464.25 vs. 333.00 for males), while social stressors were higher among males (700.50 vs. 280.50). Similarly, males showed higher mean ranks in personal stressors (490.50 vs. 385.50), environmental stressors (464.25 vs. 398.63), and work stressors (551.75 vs. 354.88). The total stress score was also higher among males (604.25 vs. 328.63). Overall, the findings indicate that males generally experience higher levels of perceived stress across most dimensions, except for family-related stress, which was higher among females.

Second: Differences According to Marital Status

The researcher used the Mann–Whitney U test to examine differences between two independent groups (single and married) according to marital status. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z test indicated statistical significance at ($p = 0.001$), which reflects the non-normality of the distribution. The results are presented in Table (4).

Table 4 *Mann–Whitney U Test for Independent Samples Showing the Significance of Differences in the Study Sample's Responses According to Marital Status (n=840)*

Variables	Marital Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann–Whitney U	Significance
Family Stressors	Married	668	406.14	271304	47858	0.001
	Single	172	476.26	81916		
Social Stressors	Married	668	411.65	274979	51533	0.05
	Single	172	454.89	78241		
Personal Stressors	Married	668	409.50	273544	50098	0.01
	Single	172	463.23	79676		
Environmental Stressors	Married	668	395.30	264059	40613	0.001
	Single	172	518.38	89161		
Work Stressors	Married	668	416.57	278269	54823	Not significant
	Single	172	435.76	74951		
Total Stress Score	Married	668	407.51	272214	48768	0.01

Variables	Marital Status	N	Mean Rank	Sum of Ranks	Mann–Whitney U	Significance
	Single	172	470.97	81006		

Table 4 show: The results of the Mann–Whitney U test show statistically significant differences between married participants (N = 668) and single participants (N = 172) in some stress dimensions and the total stress score at different levels of significance. Family stressors were higher among single participants (mean rank = 476.26 vs. 406.14 for married participants) at the (0.001) level. Personal stressors were also higher among singles (463.23 vs. 409.50) at the (0.01) level, as well as environmental stressors (518.38 vs. 395.30) at the (0.001) level. In addition, the total stress score was higher among single participants (470.97 vs. 407.51) at the (0.01) level.

In contrast, no statistically significant differences were found in work-related stress, while differences in social stressors at the (0.05) level.

The findings indicate that single individuals tend to experience or perceive higher levels of certain stressors compared to married individuals, particularly family, personal, environmental, and overall stress levels. However, no clear differences were found in work-related stress, which may reflect differences in social and family responsibilities between the two groups.

Third: Differences According to Age Groups

The researcher used the Kruskal–Wallis test to examine differences among more than two groups according to age categories. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z test were statistically significant at a level less than (0.05), indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed. The results are presented in Table (5).

Table 5 *Kruskal–Wallis Test Results for Differences in Responses Across Age Groups(n=840)*

Variable	Age Group	N	Mean Rank	H Value	df	p-value
Family Stressors	Under 30 years	140	595.50	123.163	2	0.001
	30–40 years	560	359.25			
	Over 40 years	140	490.50			
Social Stressors	Under 30 years	140	385.50	15.455	2	0.001
	30–40 years	560	411.75			
	Over 40 years	140	490.50			
Personal Stressors	Under 30 years	140	420.50	8.612	2	0.01
	30–40 years	560	407.38			
	Over 40 years	140	473.00			
Environmental Stressors	Under 30 years	140	333.00	55.392	2	0.001
	30–40 years	560	411.75			
	Over 40 years	140	543.00			
Work Stressors	Under 30 years	140	315.50	32.169	2	0.001
	30–40 years	560	442.38			
	Over 40 years	140	438.00			
Total Stress Score	Under 30 years	140	385.50	15.455	2	0.001
	30–40 years	560	411.75			
	Over 40 years	140	490.50			

Table 5 show: The Kruskal–Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences among age groups in all dimensions of stress and in the total stress score. Specifically, significant differences were found in family stressors (H = 123.163, p < .001), social stressors (H = 15.455, p < .001), personal stressors (H = 8.612, p < .01), environmental stressors (H = 55.392, p < .001), work stressors (H = 32.169, p < .001), and the total stress score (H = 15.455, p < .001).

Regarding the direction of these differences, participants under 30 years of age reported the highest levels of family stressors (Mean Rank = 595.50), whereas participants over 40 years reported the highest levels of social stressors (Mean Rank = 490.50), personal stressors (Mean Rank = 473.00), environmental stressors (Mean Rank = 543.00), and total stress (Mean Rank = 490.50). Work stressors were highest among participants aged 30–40 years (Mean Rank = 442.38), followed closely by those over 40 years (Mean Rank = 438.00).

Differences According to Educational Level

The researcher used the Kruskal–Wallis test to examine differences among more than two groups according to educational level. The results of the Kolmogorov–Smirnov Z test were statistically significant at a level below (0.05), indicating that the data were not normally distributed. Therefore, the Kruskal–Wallis test was employed. The results are presented in Table (6).

Table 6 *Kruskal–Wallis Test Results for Differences in the Study Sample's Responses According to Educational Level(n=840)*

Variables	Educational Level	N	Mean Rank	Kruskal–Wallis H	df	Significance
Family Stressors	Secondary	490	415.50	115.165	2	0.001
	Bachelor's	210	315.50			
	Master's & PhD	140	595.50			
Social Stressors	Secondary	490	365.50	390.973	2	0.001
	Bachelor's	210	688.83			
	Master's & PhD	140	210.50			
Personal Stressors	Secondary	490	425.50	27.522	2	0.001
	Bachelor's	210	467.17			
	Master's & PhD	140	333.00			
Environmental Stressors	Secondary	490	415.50	7.597	2	0.05
	Bachelor's	210	455.50			
	Master's & PhD	140	385.50			
Work Stressors	Secondary	490	470.50	229.514	2	0.001
	Bachelor's	210	490.50			
	Master's & PhD	140	140.50			
Total Stress Score	Secondary	490	430.50	215.743	2	0.001
	Bachelor's	210	560.50			
	Master's & PhD	140	175.50			

Table (6) show: the results of the Kruskal–Wallis test revealed statistically significant differences among the educational levels in family stressors ($H = 115.165$, $p < .001$), social stressors ($H = 390.973$, $p < .001$), personal stressors ($H = 27.522$, $p < .001$), environmental stressors ($H = 7.597$, $p < .05$), work stressors ($H = 229.514$, $p < .001$), and the total stress score ($H = 215.743$, $p < .001$).

Based on the mean ranks, participants holding master's and PhD degrees reported the highest levels of family stressors (Mean Rank = 595.50), followed by those with secondary education (Mean Rank = 415.50), while participants with a bachelor's degree reported the lowest level of family stressors (Mean Rank = 315.50).

For social stressors, participants with a bachelor's degree obtained the highest mean rank (688.83), followed by those with secondary education (365.50), whereas participants with postgraduate qualifications (master's and PhD) recorded the lowest mean rank (210.50).

Similarly, participants holding a bachelor's degree reported the highest levels of personal stressors (Mean Rank = 467.17) and environmental stressors (Mean Rank = 455.50), while postgraduate participants showed lower levels of these stressors.

Regarding work stressors, bachelor's degree holders recorded the highest mean rank (490.50), followed closely by participants with secondary education (470.50), whereas those with postgraduate qualifications reported substantially lower levels of work-related stress (Mean Rank = 140.50).

Concerning the total stress score, the highest level was reported by participants with a bachelor's degree (Mean Rank = 560.50), followed by those with secondary education (Mean Rank = 430.50), while participants holding master's and PhD degrees reported the lowest overall stress levels (Mean Rank = 175.50).

Discussion

The findings of the present study revealed that the overall level of life-event stress among members of the Arab community residing in Riyadh ranged from low to moderate. This finding suggests a relatively satisfactory level of psychological and social adjustment among participants despite the challenges commonly associated with living outside one's home country. This result

may be understood considering Riyadh's advanced infrastructure, diverse employment opportunities, and relatively high levels of economic and social security, which may contribute to reducing stress associated with expatriate life. Furthermore, these findings appear consistent with the broad developmental transformations currently taking place in the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia under Saudi Vision 2030, which aims to enhance quality of life and promote social and psychological well-being among both citizens and residents.

Despite the generally low level of stress, the findings demonstrated considerable variation across stress dimensions. Work-related stressors emerged as the most prominent source of stress, followed by environmental, social, personal, and family stressors. Specific life events such as the death or illness of a family member, work-related migration, concerns regarding disease outbreaks, and reduced quality of life were identified as particularly stressful experiences. These findings are consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which proposes that stress results from an individual's appraisal of environmental demands relative to available coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Given that the participants were expatriates, the prominence of these stressors may also reflect the challenges associated with geographical separation from family networks and familiar social environments. Previous migration and acculturation research has similarly suggested that expatriates often experience heightened sensitivity to family-related, occupational, and health-related stressors due to limited access to traditional support systems (Berry, 1997; Bhugra & Becker, 2005; Kuo, 2014; Ward et al., 2001).

The finding that work-related stressors constituted the highest stress dimension aligns with previous studies indicating that expatriates frequently encounter challenges associated with adapting to new organizational cultures, meeting professional expectations, maintaining job security, and pursuing career advancement opportunities (Selmer, 2002; Bailey, 2007; Takeuchi, 2010). Moreover, concerns regarding travel for employment purposes and disease outbreaks may reflect uncertainties often associated with migration experiences and transnational living arrangements. Earlier research has demonstrated that prolonged separation from family members and concerns regarding health and social stability can contribute to elevated psychological distress among migrant populations (Berry, 2006; Ward et al., 2001; Bhugra & Gupta, 2011; Sinta & Dwiyanti, 2023).

The results further demonstrate that living outside one's home country is not a uniform experience but rather varies according to demographic and social characteristics. Significant gender differences were observed, with males reporting higher levels of social, personal, environmental, occupational, and overall stress, whereas females reported higher levels of family-related stress. These findings may be interpreted through Social Role Theory, which suggests that men and women often experience different stressors due to the distinct social and economic roles they occupy (Eagly, 1987; Matud, 2004). Male expatriates frequently assume primary financial and occupational responsibilities, potentially increasing their exposure to work-related and environmental stressors. Conversely, females may remain more emotionally invested in family relationships and caregiving concerns, leading to heightened family-related stress, which coincides with (Fida et al., 2023). Similar patterns have been reported in studies examining gender differences in perceived stress among adult and migrant populations (Brougham et al., 2009; Giorgi et al., 2020; Matud et al., 2022).

Regarding age, the findings indicated that stress perceptions varied across age groups. Older participants reported higher levels of social, environmental, occupational, and overall stress, which is contrary to the results reported by (Chu et al., 2024), who found that younger individuals perceived higher levels of stress. Nevertheless, younger participants reported relatively higher levels of family-related stress. These findings are broadly consistent with lifespan developmental perspectives, which suggest that life responsibilities and social roles become increasingly complex with age (Santrock, 2021). Older adults often face greater occupational responsibilities, financial obligations, and family commitments, while also experiencing longer periods of separation from their original social networks. Consequently, expatriation-related stress may become more salient over time if adequate social and institutional support mechanisms are unavailable. These findings are consistent with studies demonstrating

that perceived stress reflects changing life demands across developmental stages (Cohen et al., 2020; Pressman et al., 2021; Aldwin, 2011). Furthermore, the relatively elevated occupational stress observed among middle-aged and older participants is compatible with the Job Demands–Resources Model, which emphasizes the relationship between increasing job demands and perceived stress when coping resources are insufficient (Bakker & Demerouti, 2017).

Educational level also emerged as a significant factor associated with variations in perceived stress. Participants with higher educational attainment reported elevated levels of stress across several dimensions, particularly occupational and social stress. Bachelor's degree holders reported the highest levels of social, occupational, and overall stress, which was emphasized by (Dorsey et al., 2022), whereas postgraduate participants reported higher family-related stress. These findings may reflect the increased professional expectations, competitive career trajectories, and heightened awareness of personal aspirations among highly educated individuals. Greater educational attainment may enhance awareness of discrepancies between personal goals and environmental opportunities, thereby increasing stress perceptions. Moreover, postgraduate participants often occupy leadership or specialized professional positions that may involve additional family and occupational responsibilities. These interpretations are consistent with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) and with empirical evidence linking educational attainment to coping resources, self-efficacy, perceived control, and stress appraisal processes (AlAteeq et al., 2020; Park et al., 2021; Matud et al., 2022; Bandura, 1997).

With respect to marital status, unmarried participants reported significantly higher levels of family, social, environmental, and overall stress compared with married participants, which coincides with (Randall et al., 2023), whereas no significant differences were found regarding personal or work-related stress. This pattern may be interpreted through the lens of social support theory, which emphasizes the protective role of family and marital relationships in providing emotional, informational, and practical support during stressful situations (Cohen & Wills, 1985). Marriage may foster a stronger sense of stability, belonging, and social connectedness among expatriates, thereby facilitating adaptation to environmental and occupational challenges. In contrast, unmarried individuals may experience greater concerns regarding social integration, future security, and adaptation to life abroad. Similar findings have been reported in previous studies demonstrating higher stress levels among unmarried individuals, particularly in social and environmental domains (Rahman & Chen, 2020; Rayan et al., 2022; Amirkhan & Vandenbelt, 2023).

Within the context of Saudi Vision 2030, these findings underscore the importance of policies aimed at improving quality of life, strengthening social integration, and creating work environments that support psychological well-being. The results also align closely with the Vision's "Vibrant Society" pillar, which emphasizes social cohesion, mental health, quality of life, and the development of attractive urban environments that facilitate adaptation and social inclusion among diverse population groups. Furthermore, the findings highlight the potential value of social and institutional support networks in reducing feelings associated with living away from one's homeland and mitigating related stressors, particularly among vulnerable demographic groups.

Overall, the findings suggest that life-event stress among Arab expatriates residing in Riyadh represents a multidimensional phenomenon shaped by the interaction of demographic characteristics, occupational demands, social roles, and adaptation experiences associated with living outside one's country of origin. The findings support theoretical perspectives emphasizing the reciprocal relationship between environmental demands and individual coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). They further suggest that initiatives aimed at improving quality of life, expanding social support systems, and adopting flexible policies that accommodate demographic diversity among residents may contribute to enhancing psychological adjustment, social integration, and overall well-being, thereby supporting the broader sustainable human development goals embodied in Saudi Vision 2030.

Study Limitations

The present study was subject to several limitations that should be considered when interpreting the findings:

- The study was confined to six Arab nationalities and did not encompass all Arab nationalities residing in Riyadh, Saudi Arabia.
- The study was conducted during the period 2025–2026.
- The study is limited by the sampling method, which is convenience sampling
- The study relied on the descriptive survey method and self-reported responses.
- The findings depended on the validity and reliability of the research instrument.
- The measurement tool was limited in scope, as it did not account for certain newly emerging sources of stress

Conclusion

The findings of the study revealed that the overall level of life-event stress among members of the Arab community residing in Riyadh ranged from low to moderate. The results further indicated that work-related stressors were the most prominent compared to the other stress dimensions. Certain life events, such as the illness or death of a family member, work-related travel, and concerns about the spread of diseases, were among the most frequently reported stressful experiences. In addition, statistically significant differences were found in stress levels according to gender, age, educational level, and marital status, although the patterns of these differences varied across the different stress dimensions.

In light of these findings, the study recommends continuing efforts to enhance quality of life and psychological well-being among residents through programs and initiatives that strengthen social support, cultural adaptation, and occupational adjustment while taking demographic differences into account. The study also recommends developing counseling and awareness programs targeting groups that reported relatively higher levels of stress in order to support their ability to cope with various life demands.

Furthermore, the study suggests conducting future research on life-event stress among other resident populations in different regions of Saudi Arabia. Additional studies may examine the relationship between stress and other psychological and social variables, such as psychological resilience, self-efficacy, social support, quality of life, and psychological adjustment. Longitudinal and comparative studies may also contribute to a deeper understanding of how stress experiences change over time and across varying social and occupational circumstances among residents.

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