

Introduction

Purpose:

The purpose of this study was to investigate the association among social support, avoidance, and stress of college students.

Background:

- Students starting their college careers experienced major adjustments to their daily routine; sleep patterns and eating habits, time-management skills, and stress levels are different in one way or another (Hirsch, Rabon, Reynolds, Barton, & Chang, 2019). Working students face absurd demands, and this accumulated stress can lead to detachment towards their school or work environment, health problems or in the worst-case scenarios, depressive thoughts and suicidal behaviors (Hirsch et al., 2019).
- Perceived stress was significantly positively related to mental health stigma, depressive symptoms, and suicidal behavior (Hirsch et al., 2019)
- Scrivner (2016) researched how students experienced stress during an exam, how prepared they felt and how confident they were after the exam. An inaccurate perception of preparedness for an exam is a potential cause of acute stress when the student feels more prepared than he or she is (Scrivner, 2016).
- Taylor et al. (2019) concluded that detachment from school or work was not helping develop a more positive well-being and healthy lifestyle, but when stress levels were too high, a break from school and/or work would be healthier. When students were experiencing extensive amounts of stress to the point of burnout, momentary detachment from school and work was a better choice for their mental health.

Hypotheses:

The researcher hypothesized that:

- no relationship would be between avoidance and social support for college students;
- no relationship would be between stress and social support for college students;
- no relationship would be found between stress and avoidance for college students.

Participants:

The participants were 34 college students at a state university in Connecticut, 18 years or older. Out of those 34 participants, 23.5% were first year students, 14.7% were sophomores, 23.5% were juniors and the majority of 38.2% were seniors. Only 23.5% were males and 76.5% were females. From this sample, 53% of the participants noted that their Grade Point Average was between 2.5 and 3.0 while 41.2% reported a Grade Point Average of over 3.5; the remaining 5.8% reported a Grade Point Average from 2.5 and below.

Measuring Instruments:

- The measuring instrument was the 17-item revised Academic Coping Strategies Scale (Sullivan, 2010).
- From this questionnaire, the researcher focused only on the Avoidance and Social Support subscales. The original questionnaire had 55 questions; however, the researcher only adopted 17 questions that were from the Avoidance and Social Support factors.
- There were 11 items from the Avoidance factor; and 6 items from the Social Support factor in the revised questionnaire.
- In addition, 12 items were focused on college students reaction to stressful situations, and 5 items focused on stress coping methods students employed.
- The validity of this questionnaire demonstrated that relationships were generally in the expected direction, although the magnitude of some correlation coefficients suggested weak or no relationships among scores (Sullivan, 2010).
- The alpha reliabilities of this study for Avoidance was .82, and Social Support was .81. These coefficients indicated adequate internal consistency for the two factors.
- Test–retest reliability for 12 days were as follows: Avoidance = .41, and Social Support = .88 ($p < .01$). These coefficients indicated high test–retest stability for the Social Support factor, but lower stability for Avoidance.

Methods

Procedures:

The participants completed the measuring instruments in person or online. Out of 34 participants, 12 completed the measuring instruments online, and 22 completed in person. The researcher gathered data in person on the first and third floors of a university library. Before completing the measuring instruments, the participants had to sign an informed consent form allowing the research to collect data. To prevent a participant from completing the measuring instruments twice, the researcher gathered the dates and signatures from the participants in person, or online, separately from their responses. The participants took approximately 5 minutes to complete the measuring instruments, and were not required to follow up with the researcher after. Participation was voluntary, and the participants had the right to stop at any time. If the participants decided not to participate or if they decided to stop taking part in the research, there was no penalty or loss of benefits to which they were otherwise entitled.

Statistical Analysis:

3 Pearson correlation coefficients were computed using SPSS 25 computer program.

Test	Criterion Variable	Predictive Variable	Hypothesis Test
1	Social Support	Stress levels	Two-tailed
2	Avoidance	Stress levels	Two-tailed
3	Avoidance	Social Support	Two-tailed

Results

- A significant medium positive correlation was found between social support and stress for college students. ($r = .516, p = .002$).
- A significant medium positive correlation was found between avoidance and stress in college students. ($r = .664, p = .000$).
- No significant correlation was found between avoidance and social support in college students ($r = -.292, p = .094$).

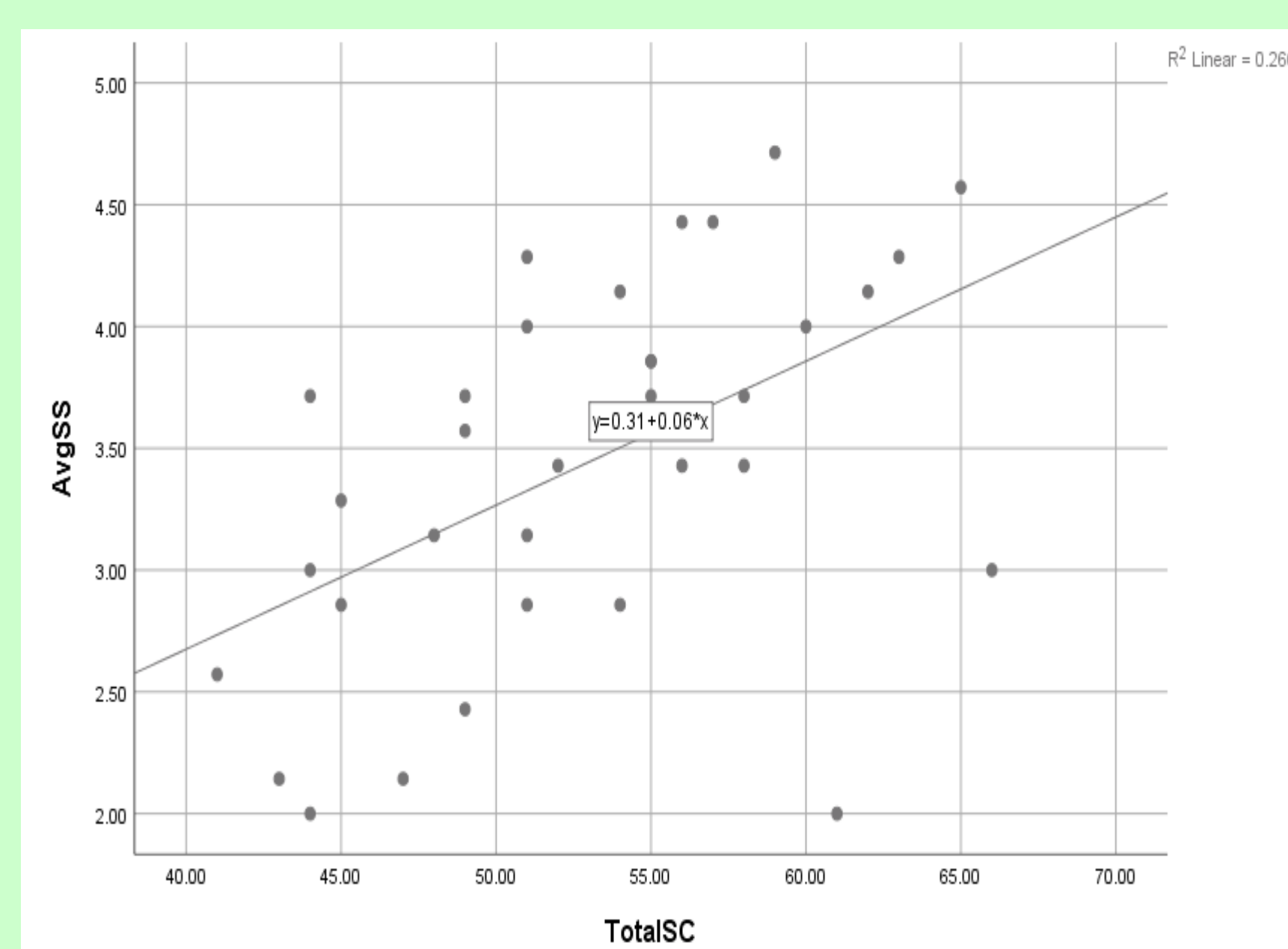


Figure 1. Scattergram represents relationship between Social support and Stress

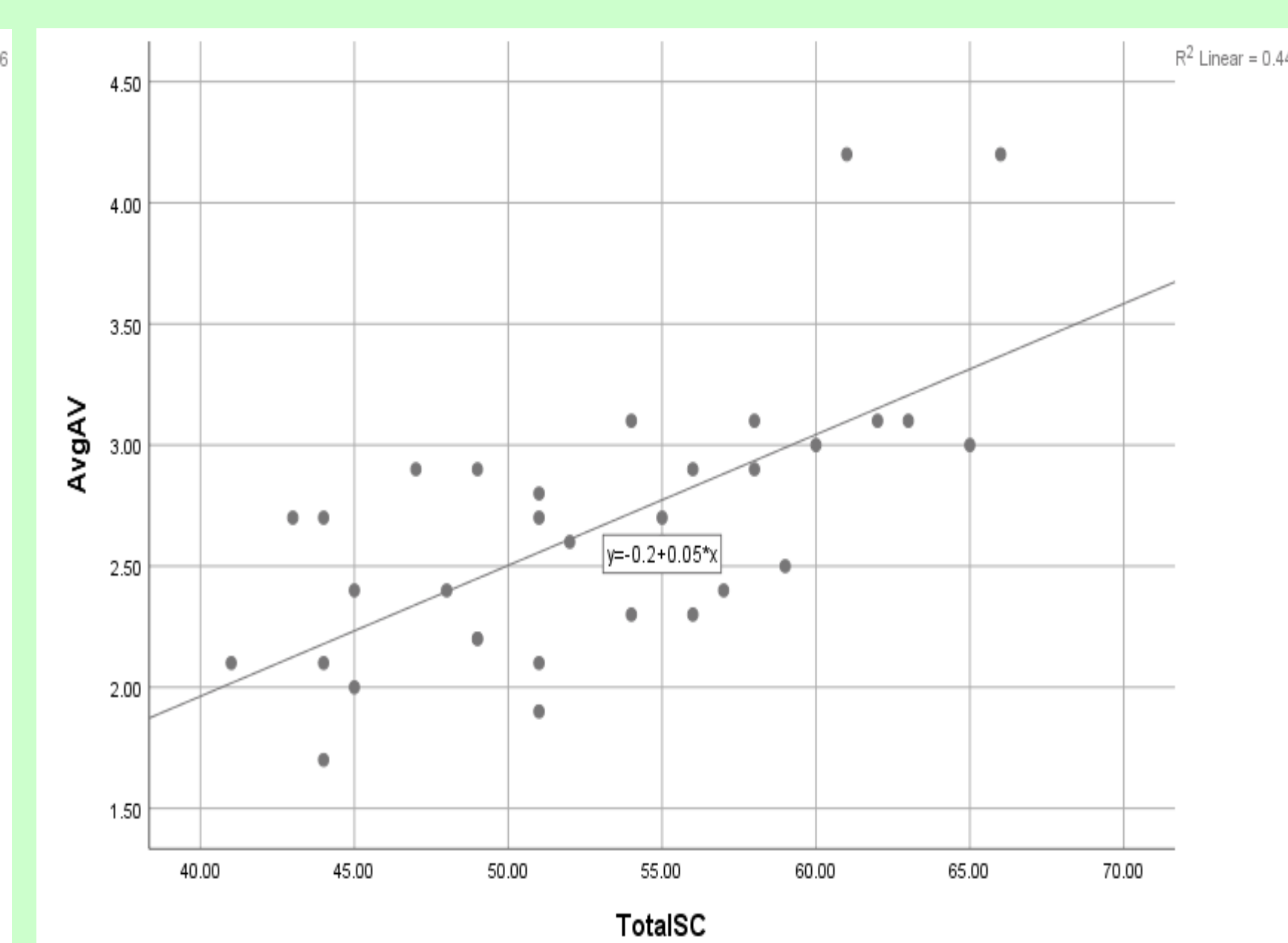


Figure 2. Scattergram represents relationship between Avoidance and Stress.

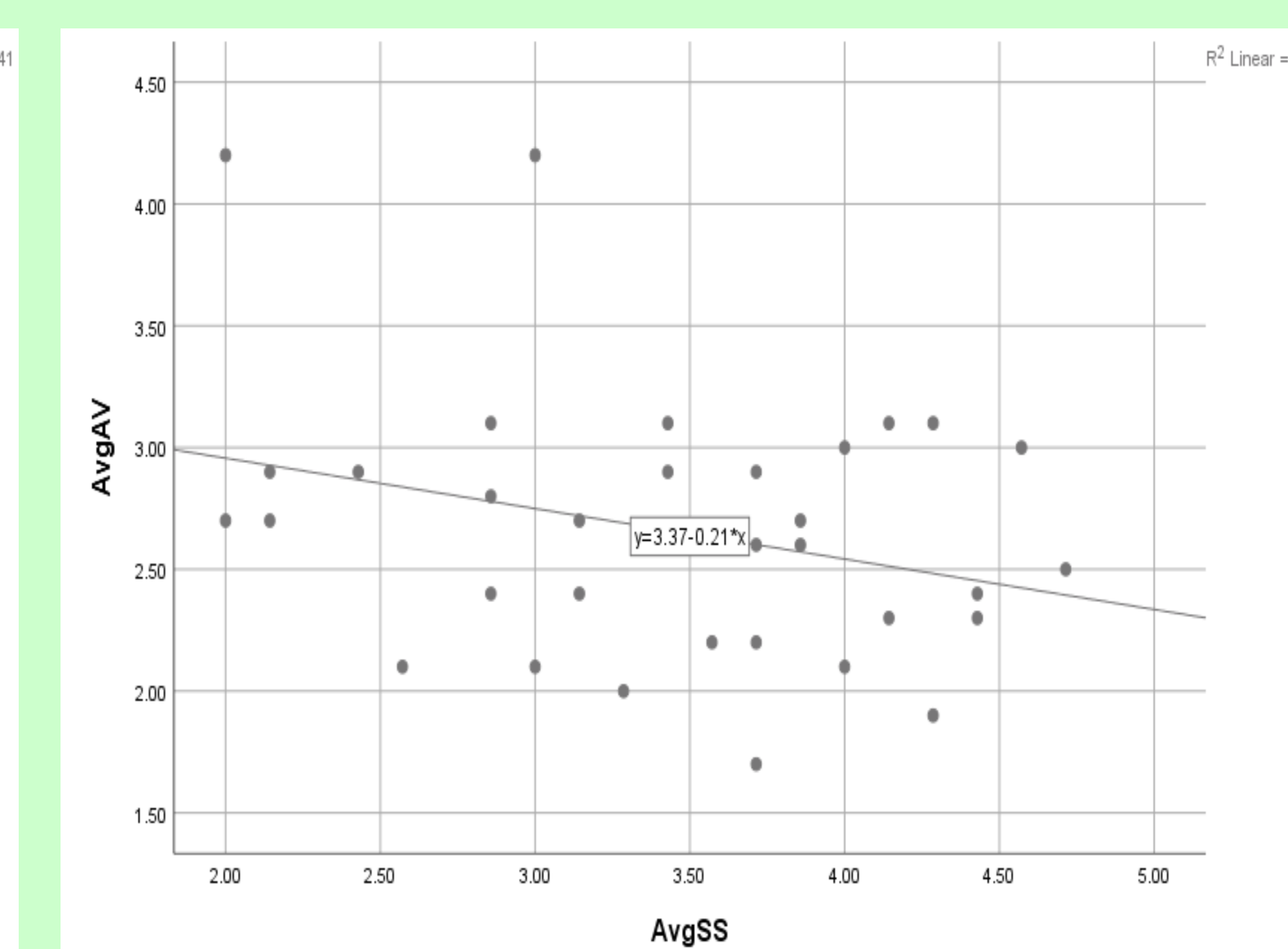


Figure 3. Figure 2. Scattergram represents relationship between Avoidance and Social Support

Discussion

- The researcher concluded that as stress increases in college students' lives, both social support and avoidance increase, whereas social support and avoidance by themselves are not related.
- Compared to previous studies, Scrivner's (2016), Taylor et al. (2019), and Hirsch et al. (2019), the researcher did not notice any new findings, as a stressful environment from college work could result in college students being avoidant to their responsibilities and/or friends and family. However, the researcher found it is strange that stress and social support were positively related, meaning the more stressed the college students, the more social support they required. The researcher expected that those two factors would be inversely related, meaning as one would increase the other one would decrease., and as college students became more stressed, they would become more avoidant rather than seek social support.

Limitations:

The limitations to this research were majorly in the methods and materials that the researcher used. The participants should have had a better ratio of males and females. In this study, only eight participants were males out of 34 in total. The researcher could also compare the associations among stress, avoidance and social support factors between males and females, but since the researcher did not have a large enough sample or a more equal ratio between the two gender groups, the researcher decided to focus on the three items only, which generally appears on college students. The researcher also wanted to compare academic performance by Grade Point Average, but the majority of the college students in this study claimed that they had a Grade Point Average of 3.0 and above, despite the stress in college life, so the researcher could not be able to investigate the association between them.

Future Recommendations:

The researcher recommends that mental health and stress of college students are very important topic, as these were found on various research studies. Stress may lead to mental health issues and suicide. The researcher recommends this study to professionals in the field of health psychology, because raising awareness about mental health to both college students and general public is very important. Future researchers can consider the limitations of this study and gather further data for more consistent findings in mental health of college students.

Presented at CREATE Conference, on April 24, 2020.

Faculty Mentor: Dr. Anita N. Lee, Department of Health Sciences, Eastern Connecticut State University

References

- Hirsch, J. K., Rabon, J. K., Reynolds, E. E., Barton, A. L., & Chang, E. C. (2019). Perceived stress and suicidal behaviors in college students: Conditional indirect effects of depressive symptoms and mental health stigma. *Stigma and Health, 4*(1), 98–106. <https://doi.org/10.1037/sah0000125>
- Scrivner, C. (2016). Correlation between acute psychosocial stress and decrease in perceived preparedness in exams. *Bios, 87*(3), 104-109. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/24878644>
- Sullivan, J. R. (2010). Preliminary psychometric data for the Academic Coping Strategies Scale. *Assessment for Effective Intervention, 35*(2), 114-127. <https://doi.org/10.1177/1534508408327609>
- Taylor, W. D., Snyder, L. A., & Lin, L. (2020). What free time? A daily study of work recovery and well-being among working students. *Journal of Occupational Health Psychology, 25*(2), 113–125. <https://doi.org/10.1037/ocp0000160>