


**Research Article**

## The Impact of Stress on Creative Thinking

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**Abstract**

Stress is something that we all have to deal with. It affects how we think, how we feel and how we behave. Stress can impact our ability to think creatively, which is important for coming up with new and innovative ideas. Creative thinking is essential for learning, working and solving problems. We need to understand how stress affects our thinking. Some research says that stress can hurt our ability to think creatively, but a little bit of stress might actually help us perform better. A study from 2025 found that stress can have a negative impact on our ability to think creatively.

This study looks at how stress affects our thinking. It considers perspectives, research and real-life examples. The study explores how stress influences our ability to solve problems, imagine things, and come up with innovative ideas. Stress can cause problems like reduced flexibility, impaired concentration and emotional exhaustion. If we have a moderate challenge, motivation and adaptive pressure, it can actually help us.

The study concludes that stress can affect our creativity. Much stress can undermine our potential, but if we have a balanced environment that minimises harmful stress, it can support stronger creative thinking.

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**KEYWORDS:** Stress, Creative Thinking, Creativity, Cognitive Flexibility, Mental Health, Innovation, Problem-Solving.

## 1. INTRODUCTION

Creative thinking is something that we all have. It helps us generate ideas, solve problems, adapt to situations and contribute to innovation. Creativity is essential for students, teachers, scientists, managers and everyday decision-making.

Modern life can be stressful. We have to deal with pressure work demands, social expectations, financial concerns and technological overload, which can all contribute to emotional strain. Stress is a response to challenges that disrupt our balance and well-being.

The relationship between stress and creativity is complicated. Some people think that stress hurts our performance, while others argue that a little bit of stress can actually stimulate creativity. Stress affects our brain processes, emotional states and motivation levels, which are all connected to thinking.

Recent studies support this view. A big analysis found that stress can have an impact on creativity, but it also found that low evaluative pressure can improve our performance.

This research paper aims to explore how stress influences our thinking, identify factors that shape this relationship, and examine strategies for maintaining creativity under stress.

## 2. LITERATURE REVIEW

The relationship between stress and creativity has been studied from organisational perspectives. Stress can hinder and enhance creative thinking. Early psychological theories emphasised the effects of stress on performance. Stress can increase our burden, leaving us with cognitive resources available for imagination and idea generation. Research consistently shows that much stress interferes with our thinking. The Yerkes–Dodson Law suggests that moderate levels of arousal or stress can improve our performance. When applied to creativity, this implies that a little bit of challenge may stimulate motivation and focus.

Empirical evidence supports this interpretation. A 2025 systematic analysis found that induced stress had a significant negative overall impact on creativity.

In real-life settings, researchers have distinguished between challenge stressors and hindrance stressors. Challenge stressors may encourage innovation, while hindrance stressors tend to reduce output and increase anxiety.

Neuroscientific studies explain. Stress activates our body's response to the release of cortisol, which can affect our memory, attention and flexible thinking.

Overall, the literature indicates that stress affects creativity in a context-specific way. A little bit of challenge may sometimes enhance our performance. Too much stress generally weakens our creative thinking.

## 3. OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

1. To know the impact of stress on our thinking and idea generation.
2. To analyse the effects of different types and levels of stress on creativity.
3. To identify strategies that can help us maintain or improve our creativity under stressful conditions.

## 4. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This study uses a research design to explore the impact of stress on creative thinking. The study is primarily based on data analysis, drawing information from peer-reviewed journal articles, academic books and credible online databases.

The methodology focuses on analysing forms of stress and how each type influences creative thinking. The study also includes examples and case-based evidence from workplace settings.

## 5. FINDINGS AND RESULTS

The findings of this study reveal that stress has an influence on thinking. Its effects vary depending on the type, intensity, duration and context of stress, as well as our individual coping abilities and personality traits.

The major findings are discussed below:

### 5.1 Negative Impact of High Stress on Creative Thinking

High levels of stress can reduce our performance. Creativity requires flexibility, openness to ideas and the ability to connect unrelated concepts. Under stress, we may experience anxiety and mental fatigue. Narrowed attention.

Stress can limit our thinking, which is essential for generating multiple original ideas. When we are under pressure, we may focus on solutions rather than exploring alternative possibilities. For example, students experiencing pressure may struggle to complete creative assignments, while employees under extreme deadlines may prioritise speed over innovation.

### 5.2 Cognitive Overload and Reduced Mental Flexibility

Another finding is that stress increases load, making it difficult for us to process information creatively. When our brain is occupied with worries, fear or emotional strain, we have mental resources available for thinking.

Creative thinking often depends on flexibility – the ability to shift perspectives and consider possibilities. Stress can impair this flexibility by increasing rigidity and reducing openness to experimentation. We may find it difficult to concentrate, remember information, and maintain attention on tasks when we are under stress.

### 5.3 Emotional Effects and Loss of Motivation

Stress can also affect our creativity through pathways. Feelings such as frustration, fear, self-doubt and emotional exhaustion can reduce our confidence and willingness to take risks.

Creativity often involves uncertainty, trying things, and requiring emotional strength. When we are under stress, we might avoid trying approaches because we are afraid of failure or criticism. This can lead to reduced motivation and creative thinking. Emotional stress can contribute to burnout, which significantly decreases our enthusiasm, curiosity and innovative thinking.

### 5.4 Moderate Stress May Enhance Creativity

Despite its effects, the study finds that moderate stress can sometimes improve our performance. A certain level of pressure may increase our alertness, focus and motivation, encouraging us to think and solve problems in innovative ways.

This is especially true when stress is seen as a challenge rather than a threat.

\* For example, manageable deadlines or healthy competition can stimulate urgency. Inspire creative problem-solving.

This finding supports the Yerkes–Dodson principle, which suggests that performance improves with arousal but declines when stress becomes excessive.

In some professions, individuals report producing their work under mild pressure as it pushes them to concentrate and act decisively.

### 5.5 Individual Differences in Stress Response

The findings show that not everyone responds to stress in the same way. Personality traits, coping strategies, emotional intelligence and previous experiences all influence how stress affects our creativity. Individuals with regulation and adaptive coping skills may maintain their creativity even under challenging conditions. They may use stress as motivation. Transform emotional tension into artistic or intellectual expression. On the other hand, individuals with lower stress tolerance may experience greater creative blocks and reduced confidence.

This suggests that personal resilience plays a role in protecting our creativity during periods.

### 5.6 Impact of Stress in Educational Settings

In environments, excessive academic stress can negatively affect students' creative thinking. Pressure related to exams, grades, deadlines and expectations may discourage experimentation and original expression. Students may focus more on memorisation and performance than on curiosity and creative exploration. Fear of failure can reduce their willingness to take risks, which are essential for innovation.

However, supportive learning environments that balance challenge with encouragement can help students maintain their creativity during demanding periods.

### 5.7 Impact of Stress in the Workplace

Workplace stress also has an influence on creativity and innovation. Employees facing deadlines, excessive workloads, and job insecurity often report creative productivity. Stressful organisational cultures may discourage risk-taking. Reduce motivation to propose new ideas. In contrast, workplaces that provide safety, flexibility and emotional support tend to foster creativity. Organisations that manage stress effectively can improve both employee engagement and innovative performance.

### 5.8 Importance of Stress Management for Creativity

A finding is that effective stress management can significantly protect and enhance our creative thinking. Practices such as mindfulness, physical exercise, adequate rest, time management and emotional support can help reduce strain and restore flexibility. Creative individuals often benefit from relaxation, reflection and periods of rest, which allow ideas to develop naturally. The study suggests that managing stress is not only important for our mental health but also essential for sustaining creativity and innovation over time.

## 6. DISCUSSION

The findings of this study demonstrate that stress has an influence on creative thinking. The relationship between stress and creativity is not entirely negative or positive; rather, it depends on the intensity, duration and perception of stress, as well as our individual coping capacity and environmental support. One of the insights from this study is that high or prolonged stress generally impairs our creativity. Creative thinking requires flexibility, openness to experimentation and emotional freedom. Excessive stress interferes with these conditions by increasing anxiety, narrowing attention, and reducing the energy for imaginative exploration. When we are overwhelmed by personal pressures, we often focus on immediate survival and task completion rather than innovation and originality. Another important point is the role of overload. Stress consumes resources such as attention, working memory and concentration, all of which are essential for generating creative ideas. Under stress, we may struggle to connect concepts, explore alternatives or think beyond existing solutions. This supports theories suggesting that mental burden limits other cognitive functions, including creativity. At the time, the study highlights that moderate and manageable stress can sometimes enhance our creativity. When stress is perceived as a challenge rather than a threat, it may increase our motivation, sharpen our focus and encourage us to think creatively. Deadlines, competition and constructive pressure can stimulate us to think efficiently and solve problems in ways.

This aligns with the Yerkes–Dodson Law, which proposes that optimal performance occurs under levels of arousal. The discussion also emphasises the importance of differences. People with resilience adaptive coping skills, and positive stress mindsets may be better able to maintain or even enhance their creativity under pressure. In contrast, those with coping strategies may experience creative blocks and emotional exhaustion more quickly. Educational and workplace environments also play a role in shaping our potential.

Settings that support people and make them feel safe to try things can really help people be creative when they are feeling stressed. On the one hand, places that are scary have really high expectations and put a lot of pressure on people, which can actually stop people from thinking creatively.

Overall, what we found out is that managing stress is not just good for people's health, but it is also really important for helping people be creative.

## 7. CONCLUSIONS

So to sum it up, stress can really affect how people think and come up with ideas, and it can even affect how they solve problems and are original. This study shows that a little bit of stress can sometimes help people perform better, but much stress can actually hurt people's creativity by making it hard for them to focus, be flexible and feel balanced and motivated. People can think creatively when they have the freedom to do what they want, are curious, and feel safe. When stress gets too much, these things can get messed up, and people may not be able to come up with new ideas and imagine things as well.

However, if people have ways to deal with stress and are in environments where they can protect their creativity and even use stress to motivate themselves and grow. What we found out is that people should learn ways to manage stress, like being mindful, relaxing, managing their time, exercising and getting support. Schools and workplaces should also try to create environments where people are challenged but also encouraged and supported. The future of creativity is not about how talented or smart people are, but also about how well they can manage stress. By understanding how stress and creativity are connected, people and organisations can help people be innovative, resilient and fulfilled.

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