Self-Efficacy and its Role in Coping with Stress: A Review of Recent Literature

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Abstract

Self-efficacy is the belief in one's capacity to achieve desired outcomes, significantly influencing stress perception and coping strategies. This review explores the relationship between self-efficacy and stress management, synthesizing findings from studies conducted between 2014 and 2024. Stress, a pervasive global health concern, negatively impacts psychological and physiological well-being, contributing to mental health issues and chronic diseases. High self-efficacy individuals tend to perceive stressors as challenges rather than threats, enabling adaptive coping mechanisms such as emotional regulation, problem-solving, and resilience. The review highlights the effectiveness of interventions like cognitive-behavioral therapy, mindfulness-based techniques, and emerging digital tools in enhancing self-efficacy and stress management outcomes. Additionally, it addresses how cultural, gender, and age variations influence self-efficacy and its application in stress coping, with collectivistic cultures favoring group-oriented coping and individualistic cultures emphasizing independence. Interventions tailored to these demographic differences have shown promise in reducing stress across various settings, including academic, workplace, and healthcare contexts. Future research should focus on underrepresented populations, cross-cultural perspectives, and longitudinal designs to establish causality and explore the dynamic interplay between self-efficacy and stress. Integrating self-efficacy into comprehensive stress management frameworks offers a robust approach to mitigating stress and fostering well-being.

Keywords: Self-efficacy, stress management, resilience, coping strategies, emotional regulation

1. Introduction

Self-efficacy is the extent of confidence an individual has in his or her ability to get the needed things to accomplish certain change initiatives. This concept has been adopted as central when explaining human motivation because it determines how a person tackles problems, continues or starts over after failures, and even comes back when defeated. Self-efficacy has a positive relationship with proactive behavior and a negative relationship with avoidance of challenges (Luszczynska et al., 2016). Efficacy and emotional regulation are related in different contexts that confirm the importance of self-efficacy in stress management (Molero et al., 2019). Self-efficacy affects stress and coping appraisal and, therefore, psychological health (Rafiei et al., 2024). Extant scholarly work has pointed to the importance of self-efficacy in both learning contexts and the professional arena in which people with higher levels of self-efficacy exhibit increased levels of stress and coping (Minnich, 2014). Stress, a physiological and psychological reaction to appraised demands, is part of human existence in the contemporary world. This has been associated with a large number of psychiatric illnesses such as anxiety and depression (Milas et al., 2021). Psychological stress has an impact on overall health including exacerbation of diseases whose causes are unknown, hypertension, elevated cholesterol, diabetes, and so on (Chu et al., 2024). Over the last few decades, researchers have paid more attention to the physiological processes of stress and its effects on well-being (McEwen et al., 2017). Researchers have pointed out that causes such as job pressure and social relationships cause mental symptoms (Kayser et al., 2022). Promoting self-efficacy is an important resource for developing and implementing interventions related to stress as a global health issue recognized at present. The latest reviews have further supported the concept of stress management to enhance the quality of mental and physical well-being of an individual (Myers et al., 2017).

Self-efficacy must always be considered when studying how people deal with stress. People with high self-efficacy, view stress as a call to action or as a challenge as opposed to a threat (Liu et al., 2024). It helps to foster constructive approaches, to stresses, such as an ability to solve problems or to seek social support instead of adopting maladaptive ones, including avoidance (Ten et al., 2021). Recent studies have shown that people with higher self-efficacy are more stress-hardy and have better emotional intelligence and fewer emotional problems (Cabrera et al., 2023). On the other hand, the research data suggest that self-efficacy lowest results are related to increased stress susceptibility and the likelihood of developing mental health disorders including anxiety and depression (Gebrie et al., 2018). Research also indicates that the effect of stress on physical health may be mediated by self-efficacy; in fact, self-efficacy might act as a buffer (Zhang et al., 2024). In addition, self-efficacy-based interventions have been found to enhance stress management skills in both clinical and nonclinical populations (Warner et al., 2020).

The purpose of this review is to analyze the current literature on self-efficacy in stress management concerning its importance among different groups and settings. Through reviewing literature from the 2014-2024 period, this review determines how self-efficacy can affect stress perceptions and coping behaviors in educational, organizational, and

healthcare contexts. It also assesses strategies aimed at increasing self-efficacy as a way of increasing stress-coping capacity. In addition, the review presents the possible consequences of the obtained results for further research and application in the sphere of psychological practice. Finally, in line to present a review of the recent literature, this paper aims to enrich the theoretical knowledge and practical applications of the interaction between self-efficacy and stress management.

2. Conceptual Framework

2.1 Historical Origins and Theoretical Foundation of Self-Efficacy
The notion of self-efficacy was first developed by Albert Bandura in the 1970s as one of the fundamental postulates of the Situational Model of behavior which is part of Social Cognitive Theory (SCT). According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is defined as one's perceived capacity to organize and empirically execute a course of action required to produce the desired outcome. This belief is the foundation for how one encounters problems, defines objectives, and endures when faced with setbacks. The SCT assumes that behavior is a function of the interaction between personal factors, environmental factors, and behavior with self-efficacy as the moderator (Bandura, 2001). Self-efficacy has emerged as one of the most influential theories in psychology and has been applied in educational settings as well as the health field and organizational behavior. Subsequent research has built more elaboration on Bandura's work of Self-efficacy across various contexts, and a protective factor for healthy adaptation (Luszczynska et al., 2016). Self-efficacy is not only a determinant of the individual's behavior but also a determinant of how people perceive and react to stress sources (Freire et al., 2020). It has also played a central role in explaining how people cope with their feelings, control their conduct, and think and make choices, particularly during increasingly stressful conditions (Harris et al., 2024). The model of self-efficiency has developed recently and new studies investigate its influence on the mental and emotional states and ways of dealing with stress.

2.2 Explanation of Self-Efficacy as a Psychological Construct and Its Role in Adaptive Functioning
Self-efficacy may contain dimensions such as academic, social, and emotional functioning to mention but a few. People with high self-efficacy will take initiative because they believe that they can alter events successfully. It is basic for adaptive functioning since it enhances resilience, decreases anxiety, and simplifies problem-solving (Yusof et al., 2021). Self-efficacy increases the chances of setting hard goals, continuing when faced with challenges, and persisting when pressured (Bhati et al., 2022). Emotional regulation is also associated with self-efficacy, as the control of negative emotions, including fear, frustration, and sadness. For instance, Lande et al. (2023) established that individuals with high self-efficacy are likely to manage their feelings in pressure situations and hence manage stress well. In addition, self-efficacy has been found to enhance physical health by promoting exercise, and compliance with medical regimens (Warner et al., 2020). Thus, the results also stress the role of self-efficacy in building the resilience and functions of an individual in their daily lives.

2.3 The Interplay Between Self-Efficacy and Stress: Theoretical Perspectives and Models
Self-efficacy and stress are two variables that are not easy to compare or analyze as they are two different constructs that interact in different ways. Stress can be described as a physical and psychological reaction to force or something that poses some form of challenge in a given environment (Folkman et al., 2017). Stress self-efficacy is also defined as one's belief in their ability to manage stress is directly linked to how people appraise stress or stressful experiences. The difference in perceived self-efficacy is beneficial as people who have a high level of self-efficacy are less likely to get stressed as they perceive stressors as challenges rather than threats and are likely to take the strategies that are more adaptive as compared to those who have low self-efficacy. These people are most likely to handle problem-solving, look for social support, and follow other recuperative coping techniques that decrease the effect of stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2017). On the other hand, low self-efficacy is correlated with a negative perception of stressors as major threats which contribute to the helplessness and usage of unhealthy coping strategies including avoidance and substance use (Vázquez et al., 2020). Such people may also show more robust physiological stress reactivity that includes cardiovascular activity as well as hormonal stress, including the cortisol hormone, which adds to the impact of stress (Slavich et al., 2016). Interaction between self-efficacy and stress has been used in other models such as the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping which indicates that self-efficacy feeds into the appraisal process to decide if a situation is potentially stressful or not.
These theoretical frameworks have been fine-tuned in recent investigations by including self-efficacy in stress and recovery. For example, Benight and Bandura (2004) established that people with high self-efficacy are more likely to get over stress-related setbacks than those with low self-efficacy and will not suffer from hedonic treadmill long-term effects. This resilience is primarily owing to their efficiency in using healthy coping mechanisms besides having control over stimuli in their surroundings (Cabrera et al., 2023). In addition, self-efficacy has been found to mediate the relationship between stress and mental health outcomes with people with higher self-efficacy reporting lower levels of anxiety, depression, and burnout (Byarugaba et al., 2022). Self-efficacy and stress have also been compared in different samples including healthcare workers, students, and people with chronic diseases. In these groups, self-efficacy has been found to

moderate the stress and coping outcomes. For instance, healthcare personnel with low self-efficiency demonstrate a perceived working dimension in the moderation of claustrophobic loading and the support of burnout effects (Labrague et al., 2017). In the same way, learners who have high academic self-beliefs engage in adaptive approaches to coping with academic stress and displaying overall academic success (Yusof et al., 2021).

3. Methodology for Literature Review

The approach used in conducting this literature review was to search for articles that focused on self-efficacy and stress coping. The aim was to systematically review the literature from the last decade and include only articles published between 2014 and 2024. The search strategy was developed to provide comprehensive and efficient identification of the published literature and included both quantitative and qualitative studies.

3.1 Literature Search Strategy
The literature search was done on several academic databases including PubMed, PsycINFO, Google Scholar, and Scopus. These databases were selected because they index a wide range of psychological, health, and social science periodicals containing scholarly articles. The following search terms were used: "self-efficacy", "stress management", "coping", "psychological resilience", "stress", "self-efficacy", and "interventions for enhancing self-efficacy". Boolean connectors like AND and OR were used to increase the relevancy of the search as it was important to inclusive studies comparing self-efficacy and levels of stress. Further, the filters were set to confine the articles to the last decade of publication (2014-2024) and the language to English. The initial search returned a huge list of articles, from which the most relevant to the research questions were selected. Titles and abstracts were scanned to determine if the studies concerning the effects of self-efficacy on stress perception and coping were data-based. The references of selected articles were also reviewed to find out more related articles, increasing the search area.

3.2 Inclusion and Exclusion Criteria
To minimize the bias of the studies reviewed, inclusion criteria were set. The study only included articles that were published in peer-reviewed journals and only articles that were published between the years 2014 and 2024. Research had to address the issue of self-efficacy and stress, including the role of self-efficacy in stress appraisal, stress coping, and stress resistance. The studies done on different samples such as students, health care professionals, and people with chronic stress were included to cover the different settings in which self-efficacy is involved in stress coping. The following types of articles were excluded from the review: theoretical papers, commentaries, and reviews; papers that did not report empirical data; papers that did not focus on stress as a major concept; papers that did not focus on self-efficacy as a major concept. Papers that did not have a clear method of analysis or had a small participant population (less than 30) were also removed to maintain the validity of the results.

3.3 Overview of Study Designs and Methodologies
Of the selected literature, the studies included different types of research and methodological approaches, which are characteristic of self-efficacy and stress as psychological factors. The most frequently reported study designs were cross-sectional surveys, experimental studies, longitudinal studies, and RCTs. In this case, cross-sectional research designs were commonly used to measure the correlation between self-efficacy and stress at the same point in time. These studies generally applied the self-report questionnaires to assess self-efficacy beliefs and stress including the General Self-Efficacy Scale or the Perceived Stress Scale (Myers et al., 2017). However, these studies offered an understanding of the link between self-efficiency level and tension, although the designed studies could not offer cause-effect relations.
In contrast, experimental longitudinal research and RCT support causal relations and the impact of interventions in increasing self-efficacy. Some of these studies used an intervention evaluation design, which provided psychological interventions aimed at enhancing self-efficacy of participants before and following the intervention such as cognitive behavior therapy or training in resilience. RCTs, especially, facilitated treatment groups' comparisons with the control ones and resulted in more accurate evidence about the impact of the self-efficacy interventions on stress decrease. Moreover, some of the research used quantitative methods, such as interviews and focus groups to examine participants' subjective perceptions of stress and self-efficacy. These studies offered more understanding of how self-efficacy affects stress perception and coping but these were done with fewer participants and subjective measures.

4. Key Findings on Self-Efficacy and Stress

4.1 Mechanisms of Action
Perceived self-efficacy also occupies a central place within the process of stress perception and management. The Social Cognitive Theory, states that self-efficacy beliefs specifically affect how a person handles stress by modulating appraisal and coping. Stress self-efficacy suggests that people with high self-efficacy approach stress more positively and assertively than those with low self-efficacy people because the latter view stressors as threats while the former view them as

challenges. This perception change leads to an enhanced positive reappraisal of stress and promotes optimal coping mannerisms that help in stress management by allowing problem-solving and seeking social support, consequently controlling the impacts of stress (Freire et al., 2020).

Emotional regulation is one of the ways by which self-efficacy affects stress. Stress makes individuals with high self-efficiency respond with lowered emotional distress because they believe they can manage their emotions and results. For instance, high self-efficacy is related to positive emotions regulating the encompasses negative emotions such as stress fear anxiety, fear, and frustration. It's optimum emotional regulation that is required to support psychological health and relieve stress. Self-efficacy also increases one's problem-solving skills – something which is very vital when it comes to handling stress. Research has it that people with high self-efficacy use enhanced problem-solving styles where the person believes he or she can resolve issues arising from daily practice (Byarugaba et al., 2022). This is different from the behavior exhibited by low self-efficacy people they are likely to avoid situations or else feel powerless in handling stress (Pérez et al., 2021). For instance, Azemi et al. (2022) have identified that employees with higher levels of self-efficiency provide solutions to work-related stress, including cognitive restructuring.

Moreover, self-efficacy has a positive relationship with resilience which is one of the important components of stress coping. Resilience means thriving after adversity, and people with high self-efficacy are more resilient than others because the latter perceive adversity or threats as challenges rather than threats (Benight and Bandura 2004). Self-efficacy promotes perseverance for success which helps in improved mental health and general functioning, especially regarding stressors (Harris et al., 2024).

4.2 Individual Variations

Self-efficacy is however a strong predictor of stress coping though it varies from one person to the other. Age, gender, and culture have a way of determining how self-efficacy works in terms of stress. For example, there is a reason to compare self-efficacy within the age context since people of older age are defined by higher levels of stress management self-efficacy than young people (Liu et al., 2020). This can be explained by life span reasons like gaining coping experiences over a timely period and increasing self-efficacy beliefs. On the other hand, students and young working people may have lower self-efficiency because of the lack of coping practice and higher academic or career stress (Ten et al., 2022). Sex is also a factor in the effects of self-efficacy on stress coping. In this context, there are particular patterns identified between the genders regarding the utilization of self-efficacy to cope with stress, such as Women are, usually, more sensitive, emotionally, and more reliant on social support than men, according to Azemi et al. (2022). Instead, another part of masculinity may entail that boys may be busy with active problem-solving and going straight to the battle (Luszczynska et al., 2016). These gender differences imply that the programs designed to increase self-efficacy may require some modifications to address these differences in coping styles.

Cultural which also affect self-efficacy and stress. This research work also revealed that culture influences self-efficacy beliefs; with collectivistic cultures endorsing group-orientation ways of coping-which may include seeking help from other members, while individualistic cultures encourage independent help-seeking (Weigold et al., 2024). For instance, a study was conducted to analyze the influence of self-efficiency in stressing handling among Chinese and American learners and noted the existence of cultural variability in handling patterns which played a moderating part in the influence between self-efficiency and stressing. Self-efficacy was found to be positively correlated with social support seeking in collectivistic cultures and with problem-solving in individualistic cultures. Further, optimism, emotional intelligence, and personality traits influence self-efficacy beliefs and their effects on stress, Usán et al. (2022) revealed that optimistic people have good self-efficacy as they are convinced they can overcome obstacles and produce positive results. Emotional intelligence which is the appreciation of recognizing and controlling emotions is also correlated with self-efficiency in that people with higher emotional intelligence will be better placed to handle their emotions when faced with stressful situations. In addition, positive properties, including personal self-esteem and self-confidence, can enhance the favorable impact of self-efficacy for on stress moderation, as people with increased levels of these traits rely on their ability to handle demands more confidently.

Table1. Summary of Key Findings on Self-Efficacy and Stress Management

Aspect	Description	Key Insights	References
Mechanisms of Action	Role of self-efficacy in stress perception and coping.	High self-efficacy individuals view stress positively, regulate emotions effectively, and solve problems.	Freire et al. (2020); Byarugaba et al. (2022); Azemi et al. (2022).
Resilience	Self-efficacy's link to resilience and perseverance.	Promotes resilience, enabling individuals to thrive in adversity and maintain mental health.	Benight & Bandura (2004); Harris et al. (2024).
Individual Variations	Differences across age, gender, and culture.	Older individuals cope better; women use social support, men prefer problem-solving.	Liu et al. (2020); Ten et al. (2022); Azemi et al. (2022).
Cultural and Personality	Impact of culture, optimism, and emotional intelligence.	Collectivist cultures favor group support; optimism and emotional intelligence enhance self-efficacy.	Weigold et al. (2024); Usán et al. (2022).

5. Applications in Stress Management

5.1 Interventions to Enhance Self-Efficacy
For this reason, self-efficacy can be enhanced by specially designed psychological and behavioral therapies that help raise individual's confidence in their ability to cope with stress. Among all the methods, CBT is used more frequently because the basis of this method is aimed at modifying negative patterns of thinking and behavior that lead to stress. CBT assists clients in changing their negative and distorted ways of perceiving things and therefore enhancing their perceived self-efficacy (Sahranavard et al., 2018). Self-efficacy-enhancing methods are cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT), mindfulness-based stress reduction (MBSR), acceptance and commitment therapy (ACT) (Zuo et al., 2023), etc, focusing on enhancing emotional regulation and psychological flexibility (Arch et al., 2022). Motivational interviewing (MI) has been used to address the decisional conflict about change and enhance self-efficiency by enhancing the perceived control and the commitment to change (Barikani et al., 2021). Specific training programs that promote stress-coping skills also help in increasing self-efficacy in that people are armed with the appropriate tools that enable them to cope with the stress (Gupta et al., 2020).

5.2 Context-Specific Applications
Stress management can be enhanced by self-efficacy interventions which can be targeted at any specific setting. The study established that more self-efficacious employees are likely to use appropriate coping strategies such as time management and support from others in countering work stress (Azemi et al., 2022). Organizational interventions are frequently stress reduction seminars and training initiatives, which explain to workers how they can successfully cope with stress at work (Myers et al., 2017). In an academic context, self-efficacy is important in the regulation of academic stress. Engaging in goal setting, self-referent thoughts, self-observation, and self-reflection as forms of self-regulation: students with higher academic self-efficacy are more efficient in terms of the use of learning strategies and cope better with academic demotivating factors (Bandura, et al., 2017). It has been established that tutoring, peer mentoring, as well as academic skills such as skills workshops can assist in decreasing academic stress and increasing students' efficacy (Kama et al., 2020).
Self-efficacy interventions impacting healthcare workers' stress and enhancing resilience are used in healthcare settings. Skills development exercise has demonstrated that training interventions that include components related to affect regulation, interpersonal communication, and positive psychology are effective in enhancing self-efficacy for dealing with workplace stress, (Baluszek et al., 2023). Furthermore, those targeted at increasing patient's self-efficacy on how to deal with chronic diseases have also been effective in managing stress. Behavioral interventions targeting self-monitoring and other aspects addressing the aspects of lifestyle help enhance self-efficacy and minimize stress-related health fears (Kerari et al., 2024).

5.3 Emerging Trends
Technology and mobile applications in particular have emerged as important factors in increasing self-efficacy for stress management. Smart applications, such as Headspace and Calm, offer clients different modes and guided methods of meditational techniques designed to build resistance against stress (Gál et al., 2021). Digital cognitive-behavioral therapy (CBT) platforms have also been reported to significantly decrease stress and increase self-efficacy providing easy and accessible interventions (Carl et al., 2020). In addition, virtual reality (VR) is a newly introduced tool in stress interventions as a way of creating simulations that may enable individuals to practice relaxation methods and thereby increasing their self-efficacy in handling stress (Freire et al., 2020). Such new technologies provide effective, versatile means for increasing self-efficacy and reducing stress.
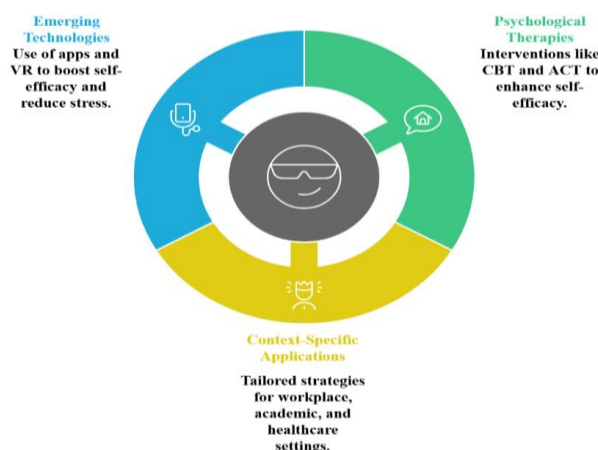

Figure 1. Applications in Stress Management

6. Challenges and Limitations

There are several issues and limitations which are associated with self-efficacy-based interventions for stress management, however, these interventions look very promising. The first one is the challenge of addressing the heterogeneity of the target population in the context of the delivered interventions. Self-efficacy and stress levels are culturally, socio-economically, and demographically sensitive, thus restricting the transferability of interventions (Cheng et al., 2021). For example, people from collectivistic cultures may have difficulties interacting with interventions that focus on personal regulation and personal responsibility as the main components of self-efficiency (Liu et al., 2020). Moreover, issues to do with language and lack of resources also compound the issues of implementing such interventions within low-income or marginalized populations (Barikani et al., 2021). The literature review revealed that many of the studies have the following methodological shortcomings: small sample size, and the absence of longitudinal designs. Small sample sizes decrease the statistical sensitivity of the studies and create a problem of external validity. Furthermore, most of the analyzed investigations used stress and self-efficacy questionnaires that can be influenced by biases like social desirability and recall bias. Another limitation, which is quite serious in this context, is that there are no reliable measures in culturally reasonable terms, many of which may not give proper credit for cross-cultural differences in self-efficacy measurements. Several issues are still open to discussion regarding the pathways of how self-efficacy affects stress and coping. Although the connection between self-efficacy and stress is well established, the role of other moderating variables including emotional regulation and social support needs to be investigated in detail. Further study is required to determine how self-efficacy moderates these variables for enhanced stress coping in different contexts.

7. Future Directions

To further develop the knowledge base regarding self-efficacy for stress management, subsequent research has to move the extension of current research endeavors to other, as yet under-researched, target groups and settings. Most of the current research has been conducted on these, middle-aged adults, and thus little is known about how self-efficacy affects stress coping in other populations such as ethnic minorities, the elderly, and those with chronic illnesses. Finally, further research should be done to understand the effect of self-efficacy in other parts of the world, as the culture environment, and societal changes may impact stress apprehension and coping strategies in a rather different way. The longitudinal research would enable the establishment of the causal relationship between self-efficacy and stress. However, cross-sectional studies do not give information about how self-efficacy might be acquired or may change regarding stress. Future research should also establish the temporal sequence between self-efficacy and stress and identify whether the improvement of self-efficacy results in a long-term decrease in stress. Last, the included self-efficacy within comprehensive stress interventions holds the most potential for future practice. Many of today's interventions target stressors or coping mechanisms but combining self-efficacy with a multi-factorial model that includes social support, emotional regulation, and resilience may provide more effective solutions to stress. Further research should be conducted to establish how these facets are interrelated and could affect health status.

8. Conclusion

The literature reviewed in this paper points to self-efficacy as a key determinant of stress management across population groups and settings. Therefore, self-efficacy as one of the human psychological resources enables one to regulate his or her perceptions of stressors as being situation- rather than self-taxing hence enabling one to utilize effective coping. The reviewed studies reveal self-efficacy as a key determinant of stress experience and self-regulation, as the improvement of problem-solving skills is crucial. In addition, efforts aimed at promoting self-efficacy have been developed as efficacious in increasing stress coping in academic, work, and healthcare contexts and include cognitive-behavioral therapies and mindfulness-based treatment. The implications for psychological practice are therefore significant. Clinicians can teach self-efficacy-enhancing strategies for use in stress management during the therapy. Mental health professionals can promote an environment in which the clients feel they are capable of handling stress and that will enable them to be better off.Also, the community advisors can encourage policy support of stress management which enhances self-competence in different sectors of public health and organisations focusing on highly stressed vocational and education milieus. In future research, there is a need to extend research with reach to different populations as well as the context of different groups who have not been studied sufficiently. Cohort research is necessary to determine causal relations between self-efficacy and stress results and to increase understanding of how self-efficiency changes and influences stress. Moreover, the incorporation of self-efficacy in stress management models, which address effects regulation, social support, and coping, can suggest better solutions to stress challenges. Overall, it can be stated that self-efficacy is a critical factor in stress coping and that its promotion is a potentially fruitful area for both treatment and stress reduction approaches. More experiments are needed for this methodology to reach its potential for creating positive mental health changes.

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