

Enhancing Stress Resilience: A Study on Stress Management Strategies among Students at Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria

Abstract

The study investigated stress management among students of Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria. The study adopted the descriptive survey design. The target population which served as sample of the study comprised 982 final year students of the faculty of education and faculty of social sciences. There was no sampling since the population was manageable. An 88-item questionnaire was the instrument used for data collection. The questionnaire contained two parts: part A had 4 items of demographic variables of respondents – Name of faculty, department, sex and age. Part B contained 85 items based on the three Research Questions: 1 contained 34 items, 2 contained 27 items and 3 contained 24 items. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-point scale of responses: Very High Extent 4-points, High Extent 3-points, Low Extent 2-points, Very Low Extent 1-point. There was face and content validity of the instrument. To ensure internal consistency of the instrument, 155 copies of the questionnaire were administered to final year students at the Kwara State University, Malete. The data collected were subjected to Cronbach alpha which yielded the following reliability coefficient results: 1($r=0.93$), 2($r=0.90$) and 3($r=0.88$). A total of 1024 copies of the questionnaire were administered. 982 copies were fully completed and returned giving a 91.32% rate of return. The study took a period of six weeks. Data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviations. All the findings are to a High Extent for causes of stress, effect of stress and stress management strategies among students of Delta State University, Abraka. Among the stress management strategies identified are learning security, adequate counselling services and avoiding of unnecessary competitions. It was recommended among others that students workload should be reduced, universities should give students access to free periodic medical examination, student should be involved in decision making and government should aid the universities to provide adequate learning facilities to reduce stress.

Keywords: *Stress, strategies, management, students, university.*

Introduction

Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension emanating from challenging and inauspicious circumstances. Selye (1956) defines stress as a response to noxious or aversive stimuli. He emphasizes that stress is measured in terms of physiological responses, such as those represented by sympathetic adrenal-medullary activity or by pituitary – adrenal – cortical activity. Bartwal and Singh (2014) affirm that stress is experienced when a person's expectation exceeds ability to cope. Stress affects not only the brain but also the entire human body system. Hellhammer and Hellhammer (2008) observe that when a stressful situation is not promptly coordinated or adapted to, it could deteriorate into complications such as physiological disorder, pain, anxiety and brain malfunctioning.

When the human body is under stress, the adrenal gland releases corticosteroids that get converted to cortisol in the blood stream and these could affect the proper functioning of the body system (Longe and Sadoh, 2019). Even though appropriate stress may have a positive effect on a person's achievement, stress is mainly known to have negative consequences (Freedy and Hobfoll, 2017). The everyday life that humans live all over the world is not without stress. This is because stress is required for optimum functionality in every human endeavour and living experience. Every additional step taken to achieve a goal involves additional stress. Every individual could be at risk of stress whether young or old.

Modern life with its tight schedules and the rigour of learning, the workplace and social interaction task the human mind almost to its elastic limit and this is often detrimental to the body. This, most of the time, has a negative effect on an individual's state of mind, mental health and cognitive capacities (Crockett, Iturbide, Torres, McGinley, Rafficili and Carlo, 2007). Stress degenerates into social problems such as anxiety, uneasiness and ill-health and these directly or indirectly affect an individual's level of responsibility and work output (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

- Long and Sadoh (2019) observe that stress is one of the quickest killers of man. Davis (2000) affirms that a certain level of pressure is necessary for an individual to work effectively; however, stress occurs when the pressure one is exposed to exceeds what the person can cope with. Hussein and Hussein (2006) maintain that even though pressure may propel performance, optimum achievement is elusive in an environment with excessive pressure, especially, where that pressure becomes a burden to students and teachers, or where people are coerced to undertake tasks beyond their capabilities. Longe and Sadoh (2019) observe that stress is a major hindrance to learning and achievement in school. Choa (2012) also points out that institutions of higher learning, especially at the entry and graduating levels present additional stress to students owing to the experiences of transition from secondary school to the tertiary institution and from the tertiary institution to the world of work. There seems to be a correlation between learning and stress among university students which affects their performance. Martin (1997) points out that increasing stress in a constructive manner could increase efforts, stimulate creativity and encourage diligence in one's work and efficiency up to a point. However, excessively high stress may be counterproductive as it can cause a person's physical and mental breakdown and impair performance.

Among the causes of stress are high expectation of parents and teacher concerning the performance of their wards and students in examinations and the challenges associated with coping with learning tasks (Hong and Zhang, 2011). For

most students and teachers, the causes of stress include changes in environmental living conditions, financial difficulties, changes in sleeping habits, poor feeding habits, combining work with studies, low academic achievements, lack of adequate vacation and break. Other causes which are self-imposed include peer and social relationships, interpersonal difficulties with faculty members, distraction and frustration, overbearing self-expectation, reference group perception among others.

Peretomode (2008) identifies the stress factors associated with the job and the organization itself which he refers to as intrinsic job stressors. These include poor or uncomfortable physical and working conditions, work overload, work under load, information overload, role conflict, ineffective communication, role ambiguity, lack of job security, high speed demand, low speed demand, lack of career development, lack of structure for retirement, under-promotion, over-promotion, especially when the individual has low self-competence and a feeling of not being able to perform effectively in the new position. Others include ineffective organizational design, scramble for scarce resources, poor interpersonal relationship culminating in misunderstandings and interpersonal conflicts, over restrictive work rules, regulations and control systems, conflicting demands, unrealistic salary, imbalance between demands and capacity, unpopular and unacceptable executive orders, inadequate authority, for instance, not being in control, inadequate responsibility people and for things such as budgets, equipment and buildings, lack of career progress or career progress that is too slow or too fast, nature of the job, leader's behaviour and job performance evaluation process.

Longe and Sadoh (2019) also indicate the following as causes of stress among students: excess work load emanating from too many assignments and prolonged lecture hours, challenges of catching up with classes, challenges that come with each day, unfavourable study environment and learning conditions, personal and emotional issues. According to James, Omoaregba and Igberase, (2011), stress affects the proper functionality of most students' brain capacity and neutralizes their ability to socially and physiologically protect themselves. Most students combine a daily busy schedule along with education resulting in anxiety, and depression. This often leads to emotional breakdown and various forms of illness (Awofodu and Emi, 2011).

It is often noticed among students of higher institutions that stress reduces ability to concentrate and it negatively affects the students' level of productivity. Students have been known to breakdown during examination. Some faint; some collapse and in extreme cases, some openly manifest mental instability in the examination hall. All these are signs of stress which could ultimately lead to death. The symptoms of stress may persist for several days or months as the case may be and getting access to normal physiological therapy and coherent alternation from stress could be very challenging.

A stressed student tends to have a difficult time coping with learning and sustaining productive academic focus. Stress creates an atmosphere of inability to cope with class assignment, group or school work and also to maintain adequate social and emotional consistency in academic achievements. Stress often causes students to burn out. The outcome is generally one of poor social adaptation and relationship among the students.

According to Wikipedia, stress management consists of a wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person's level of stress, especially chronic stress, usually for the purpose of improving everyday functioning. Broman-Fulks and others (2012) point out that given the beneficial nature of mild to moderate levels of stress, stress management does not aim at eliminating all stress. Rather, stress management techniques are designed to keep stress levels within an optimal range. Engaging in healthy lifestyle behaviours can help to reduce stress and maximize the likelihood of living a long, healthy life.

Peretomode (2008) identifies the following stress management strategies: providing workers with job security in order to eliminate stressors that are related to economic challenges, use of flexible work schedules to enable employee cope with conflicts between work and personal life such as a sick child, involvement of workers in making decisions that affect them and their jobs, establishment of company Day Care centres, use of job sharing method whereby two or more workers are responsible for a single job and agree on how to divide the job tasks and working hours; one worker might perform the job in the mornings and another in the afternoons; workers might alternate days or each worker might be accountable for particular tasks and assignments. Others are provision of counselling services to workers to help them reduce feelings of stress and emotions resulting from alcoholism, drug abuse and family challenges, provision of on-site exercise facilities that employees can use before and after work, improved working conditions for workers and periodic medical examinations of employees and treatment of stress related ailments. Martin (1997) affirms that job sharing is an effective stress management strategy as it enables employees to cope with overlapping demands on their time from work and personal responsibilities.

Statement of the Problem

In every organizational setting, people interact daily and work towards attainment of set goals. In universities and other tertiary institutions, students are admitted yearly. It is the expectation of the students that they graduate on time in order to have a good life outside the school. Students are expected to graduate with good grades and this has led them to read daily, sometimes overnight. Many times they tackle overburdening assignments from teachers in order to complete their work schedules (Okoro, 2018). During examination, the work load becomes so burdensome that the students find it difficult to cope. Although all these help the students to come

out with the desired grades at the end, the excess pressure may cause stress and emotional imbalance in the students, especially if they are unable to manage the stress. The problem of this study therefore is stress management among students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of the study is to assess the causes and strategies of stress management among students of Delta State University, Abraka. Specifically, the objectives are:

- To find out the causes of students stress
- To determine how stress affects students
- To determine the stress management strategies that can control stress among university students for optimum performance.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- What are the causes of stress among students in Delta State University, Abraka?
- What are the effects of stress among students in Delta State University, Abraka?
- What are the stress management strategies among students in Delta State University, Abraka?

Review of Related Literature

Stress Management: Conceptual Framework

In the recent decades, a lot of attention has been drawn to the issue of stress management in almost all the diverse sectors of human society. The process of stress management is vital to a happy and successful life. This is because life in modern societies carries with it so many co-occurring demands that handling the various tasks generates severe stress with much negative effect. It is stress management that provides the way out of unnecessary anxiety and emotional instability thereby creating the atmosphere for sustainable health.

Yusoff, Yaacob, Naing and Esa (2013) developed a conceptual framework of stress management. It is focused on stress management intervention for medical students and teachers. They proposed a four-dimensional conceptual framework that is known as DEAL (Detection, Evaluation, Action and Learning through self-reflection). The DEAL model was developed based on the interrelationship of stress, stressors and coping strategies in relation to effective, cognitive and psychomotor learning taxonomy. In the conclusion of their discussion, these authors indicated that the DEAL framework will be able to knock unawareness condition into awareness, through the awareness will develop into attention and through the attention will

develop into intention, and through the intention will develop positive action that will lead to continuous development of individual's stress management skills.

A study of France (1993) on Effective Stress Management, divided work in stress management into three groups. He referred to the first as management of vocational stress and according to him, this has been attempted by various employers and professional groups with a considerable level of success. In the second group, he referred to the use of stress management techniques in specific conditions such as migraine, hypertension and irritable bowel disease. In the third group, he referred to the provision of more inclusive programmes which offer a body of information and a package of techniques which are intended to provide help for a wide range of people faced with many diverse stressful situations. He concluded that it was a background in cognitive behaviour therapy stimulated by the advent of the new general practitioner contract that prompted the need to devise a suitable programme in the third category for general use by members of the primary health care team.

Israel, Baker, Goldenhar, Heaney and Schurman (1996) discussed a comprehensive model of occupational stress and health developed at the University of Michigan Institute for social Research. According to the authors, this model provides a useful framework for understanding the diverse factors and complex relationships associated with work and health. In their discussion, they present occupational stress as a complex and dynamic process in which stressors, perceived stress, short-term responses and modifying factors all affect each other and long term health outcomes. They concluded that this conceptual framework of stress and health provides a useful overarching model of understanding and guiding the development, implementation and evaluation of a more comprehensive approach to occupational health. They therefore recommended that given the current political climate, it is important that comprehensive preventive interventions should be developed and conducted at the local and organizational levels.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on the stress reduction theory developed by Ulrich et al (1991). The SRT is a psychological evolutionary model that focuses on the physical environment. It emphasizes the importance of recovery from psychological and physiological stresses associated with threats or challenges based on emotional functioning. Stress recovery, according to Ulrich, involves the recovery or restoration from excessively arousing states, both psychologically and physiologically. Stress recovery in this context is a part of the larger concept of restoration, which also encompasses factors such as recovery from under stimulation and recovery from anxiety. This theory is quite applicable to stress management among University students owing to the theory's emphasis that after being in stressful space, a biological and almost automatic preparedness initiates a response. Honold, Landro

and Meer (2016) re-emphasized this idea, stating that positive or negative experiences adjust an individual's neurophysiological activation, which triggers nerve impulse that result in adaptive behaviours. Walker and Tassinary (2008) also working in line with this theory, highlighted that attention can be redirected from a negative experience to a pleasant stimulus, such as a nature setting. From this perspective, attention is redirected from negative emotions in order to sidetrack and focus on something else, thereby producing pleasant feelings and reducing tension.

Methodology

This study adopted descriptive survey design. It investigated stress management among students of Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. The target population which served as sample of the study comprised 982 final year students of the faculty of education and faculty of social sciences. There was no sampling since the population was manageable. Hence, the sampling technique employed was total enumeration non-probability sampling technique. The instrument for data collection was an 88-item questionnaire which was divided into two parts: part A contained 4 items of demographic variables of the respondents such as name of faculty, sex, department and age. Part B contained 85 items based on the three Research Questions: Research Question 1 contained 34 items, Research Question 2 contained 27 items and Research Question 3 contained 24 items. The questionnaire was structured on a 4-points, scale of responses: Very High Extent 4-points, High Extent 3-points, Low Extent 2-points, Very Low Extent 1-point. There was face and content validity of the instrument. The questionnaire constructed was given to 3 experts in measurement and evaluation, 3 in sociology and psychology and 3 in Business Education at the Delta State University, Abraka. The experts made appropriate corrections which were effected before the final copy of the questionnaire was written. To ensure internal consistency of the instrument 155 copies of the questionnaire were administered to final year students at the Kwara State University, Malete in the faculties of education and social sciences. The data collected were subjected to Cronbach Alpha which yielded the following reliability coefficient results: Research Question 1 ($r = 0.93$), Research Question 2 ($r = 0.90$) and Research Question 3 ($r = 0.88$). A total of 1024 copies of the questionnaire were administered. With the help of 3 research assistants in each of the 2 faculties, 982 copies were fully completed and returned. There was return rate of 91.32%. The data collected were analysed using mean and standard deviations. In decision rule, any item with a mean score of 2.5 and above is regarded as High Extent while any item below 2.5 is regarded as Low Extent.

Results

The results of the research are discussed as follows:

Research Question 1

What are the causes of stress among students in Delta State University, Abraka?

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Respondents on Causes of Stress among Students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

S/N	Items on Causes of Stress among Students	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
1.	Personal issues	982	2.96	0.88	High Extent
2.	Prolong lecturer hours	982	2.88	0.83	High Extent
3.	Unfavourable learning conditions	982	3.01	0.96	High Extent
4.	Too much assignment	982	2.69	0.89	High Extent
5.	Emotional issues	982	2.95	0.74	High Extent
6.	Challenges that come with each day	982	3.22	0.89	High Extent
7.	Catching up classes	982	3.45	0.74	High Extent
8.	Study environment	982	2.99	0.82	High Extent
9.	Excess workload from the teachers	982	3.58	0.80	High Extent
10.	Higher speed demand of the job from teachers	982	3.64	0.77	High Extent
11.	Meeting too many deadlines	982	3.62	0.87	High Extent
12.	Overcrowding classroom	982	3.50	0.90	High Extent
13.	Excess noise	982	3.53	0.93	High Extent
14.	Poor office equipment	982	3.57	0.79	High Extent
15.	Overloading of information for students	982	3.25	0.78	High Extent
16.	Ineffective communication from teachers	982	3.24	0.83	High Extent
17.	Lack of leadership behaviour	982	3.07	0.94	High Extent
18.	Inadequate security in the classroom	982	3.43	0.97	High Extent
19.	Poor continuous assessment	982	3.37	0.86	High Extent
20.	Poor Interpersonal relationship	982	2.98	0.91	High Extent
21.	Conflicting demand from teachers	982	2.78	0.72	High Extent
22.	Restrictive work rules	982	2.95	0.78	High Extent
23.	Poor communication network	982	2.76	0.78	High Extent
24.	Ineffective organizational design	982	2.99	0.80	High Extent
25.	Poor instructional facilities	982	3.01	0.87	High Extent
26.	Unacceptable executive orders	982	2.73	0.90	High Extent
27.	Fear of dropout	982	2.89	0.93	High Extent
28.	Too much responsibility for students	982	2.83	0.79	High Extent
29.	Poor performance of teachers	982	2.65	0.78	High Extent
30.	Temperature extreme	982	2.67	0.83	High Extent
31.	Poor lighting	982	2.55	0.94	High Extent
32.	Unsafe classroom condition	982	2.96	0.97	High Extent
33.	Excessive teaching hours	982	2.45	0.71	High Extent

34.	Low speed demand	982	2.65	0.86	High Extent
Grand Mean			2.76	0.83	High Extent

On table 1, items 1 to 33 have a mean score of 2.5 and above. Therefore, all the items are causes of stress among students in the university. The grand mean of 2.76 also confirmed it.

Research Question 2

What are the effects of stress among students in Delta State University, Abraka?

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Respondents on effects of Stress among Students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria. $N = 982$

S/N	Items on Effect of Stress	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
35.	Fast breathing	982	3.62	0.87	High Extent
36.	Dry mouth	982	3.50	0.90	High Extent
37.	Dry throat	982	3.53	0.93	High Extent
38.	Lack of appetite	982	3.57	0.79	High Extent
39.	Cold	982	3.25	0.78	High Extent
40.	Back aches	982	3.24	0.83	High Extent
41.	Dizziness	982	3.07	0.94	High Extent
42.	Unable to fall asleep	982	3.43	0.97	High Extent
43.	Fidgeting	982	3.22	0.78	High Extent
44.	Breathlessness without exertion	982	3.37	0.83	High Extent
45.	Headaches	982	2.98	0.94	High Extent
46.	Boredom	982	2.78	0.97	High Extent
47.	Depression	982	2.95	0.71	High Extent
48.	Absence of sense of honour	982	2.76	0.86	High Extent
49.	Loss of concentration	982	2.99	0.72	High Extent
50.	Poor judgement	982	3.01	0.78	High Extent
51.	Absence job learning satisfaction	982	2.73	0.78	High Extent
52.	Change in usual communications	982	3.58	0.80	High Extent
53.	Neglect of responsibility	982	3.64	0.77	High Extent
54.	Poor decision-making	982	2.62	0.87	High Extent
55.	Carelessness	982	3.50	0.90	High Extent
56.	Reduced innovation yawning	982	3.53	0.93	High Extent
57.	Procrastination	982	3.25	0.86	High Extent
58.	Feeling of ugliness	982	3.24	0.72	High Extent
59.	Inability to show true feeling	982	3.07	0.78	High Extent
60.	Eating too less	982	3.45	0.71	High Extent
61.	Lack of interest	982	2.78	0.86	High Extent
Grand Mean			2.88	0.87	High Extent

On table 2, item 35 to 61 have a mean score of 2.5 and above. Therefore, all the items are effects of stress among students in the university. The grand mean of 2.88 also confirmed it.

Research Question 3

What are the stress management strategies among students in Delta State University, Abraka?

Table 3: Mean and Standard Deviation Ratings of Respondent on Stress Management Strategies among Students in Delta State University, Abraka, Nigeria.

S/N	Items on Effect of Stress	N	\bar{x}	SD	Decision
62.	Getting help from the others	982	3.62	0.87	High Extent
63.	Involvement of students in decision-making	982	3.50	0.90	High Extent
64.	The students may negotiate with teachers	982	3.53	0.93	High Extent
65.	Providing students with learning security	982	3.57	0.79	High Extent
66.	Use of flexible work schedules	982	3.25	0.78	High Extent
67.	Use of job-sharing method	982	3.24	0.83	High Extent
68.	Provision of on-site exercise facilities	982	3.07	0.94	High Extent
69.	Provision of counseling services	982	3.08	0.83	High Extent
70.	Improve learning conditions	982		0.70	High Extent
71.	Periodic medical examinations	982	3.18	0.68	High Extent
72.	Avoid unrealistic deadlines	982	2.88	0.78	High Extent
73.	Eat well-balanced nutrients meals	982	2.81	0.73	High Extent
74.	Doing the things, you like	982	3.14	0.70	High Extent
75.	Good management of your time rationally	982	2.79	0.77	High Extent
76.	Be positive in your thinking	982	2.54	0.62	High Extent
77.	Avoid bad stimulants	982	2.86	0.74	High Extent
78.	Avoid unpleasant situations	982	2.88	0.73	High Extent
79.	Focus on your good qualities	982	2.68	0.71	High Extent
80.	Avoid unnecessary competition	982	2.76	0.74	High Extent
81.	Recognize your limit	982	2.70	0.80	High Extent
82.	Listening to music of your interest	982	2.46	0.77	High Extent
83.	Opening up to trusted persons	982	2.28	0.87	High Extent
84.	Engaging in behaviour of self-control	982	2.66	0.90	High Extent
85.	Loving others as oneself	982	2.78	0.93	High Extent
	Grand Mean				High Extent

On table 3, items 62 to 85 have a mean score of 2.5 and above. Therefore, all the items are stress management strategies among students in the University. The grand mean of 2.82 also confirmed it.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that stress pervades every institution of higher learning not only in Nigeria but also elsewhere around the world. Students get stressed up because of challenges of learning, examination and the fear that they might not meet expectations. Research Question one identified the causes of stress among university students. These include fear of dropping out of school, overloaded responsibilities and conflicting demands from teachers, parents and guardians. This finding is consistent with the study of peretomode (2008) and Chao (2012) who earlier identified some causes of stress among students including intrinsic job stressors such as poor environmental conditions and excessive demands, especially at the points of entry into institutions of higher learning and during the process of graduation. The findings of the study also revealed that the effects of stress can be devastating if not promptly and appropriately managed. Research Question two indicated a number of effects of stress among university students. These include loss of appetite, breathlessness, loss of concentration and depression. This finding is in agreement with the study of James, Omoaregba and Igberase (2011) which showed that stress affects the proper functionality of most students' brain capacity and neutralizes their ability to socially and physiologically protect themselves. The study also showed strategies of stress management. These include providing students with learning security, provision of counselling services, involving students in decision making, avoiding unnecessary competitions and avoiding bad stimulants. The study establishes that stress management is vital because demands of modern society generate severe stress with much negative effect and it is stress management that is the panacea to anxiety and emotional instability. This finding is corroborated by the earlier study of France (1993) which categorized stress management into management of vocational stress, management of specific conditions such as migraines and provision of more inclusive programmes that can help in diverse stressful situations. On the whole, this study established that stress management is very necessary in University education for students to obtain optimum achievement and still remain in good health conditions.

Conclusion

The study examined stress management among students of Delta State University Abraka, Nigeria. It drew 982 final year students from the faculties of Education and social sciences. The results revealed that most of the participants

attested to a high extent of stress among final year students of the university. The study identified the causes and effects of stress as well as effective strategies of stress management among university students. It showed that a lot needs to be done in the area of stress management among University students. This is why the study has clearly spelt – out the strategies that could be utilized towards effective management of stress among university students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations are made:

1. Unnecessary work load should be **avoided** so students could have enough time to rest.
2. Universities medical services should be strengthened to provide free periodic medical examination to students.
3. Universities counselling units should also be updated to provide effective counselling to students on stress management.
4. Students should also be involved in decision making so that no university policy comes to them as a burden.
5. Government should aid universities to provide adequate facilities to ease the challenges of learning.

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