



Stress Coping Measures among Undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka

Agatha Nneka Obayi^{1*}, Gabi Sunday Tsibi², Agnes Onyemaechi Nwodo³

¹Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

²Department of General Studies, Isa Mustafa Agwai 1 Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State

³Federal College of Education Technical, Akoka Yaba Lagos State

* Corresponding Author: agatha.obayi@unn.edu.ng, 08146707527

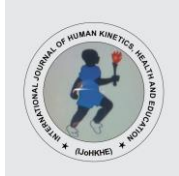
Abstract

Stress is a global public health problem experienced by people irrespective of class, colour, ethnicity, profession or academic background. Researchers observed that undergraduate students suffer from health problems such as slumping, depression and mental health challenges which ordinarily should not occur at their youthful ages. However, the study assessed stress coping measures among undergraduates of University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Three research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. The cross sectional survey research was used for the study. The study population consisted of 24,458 undergraduates. The multi - stage sampling procedure was used to draw a sample size of 400 undergraduate students. A valid and reliable structured Stress Coping Measures Questionnaire -(SCMQ) was used for data collection. Frequencies and percentages were used to analyse and answer the research questions while chi - square statistics was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Results showed that undergraduates possessed high stress coping measures (82.4%). No significant difference existed in the stress coping measures of undergraduates based on gender (p - value = .332 >.05) while a significant difference existed on year of study (x p - value = .012 <.05). However, curriculum developers should enrich the curriculum with appropriate strategies suitable for all undergraduates, especially during the orientation of new students for understanding and effective application of stress coping measures among them.

Keywords: Stress, Coping, Measures, Undergraduates

Introduction

Stress is a global public health problem which people all over the world experience, irrespective of race, colour, ethnicity, profession, or academic background. Adopting effective stress coping measures will go a long way to reduce the challenges faced by undergraduates on academic achievements due to stress. Stress can result from illness, job demands or workload at work places, moving into a new house, which may sometimes exert too much pressure than one cannot bear, leading to physical fatigue and break down (Scott, 2020). Gallup Global Emotions (2021) reported that almost 190 million people worldwide experienced significantly higher stress in 2020 than in previous years, as a result of COVID-19 pandemic. Manchia et al. (2021) noted that there was increased risk of stress related psychological symptoms among their study population. Stress develops when an individual cannot handle one's inner and outer feelings. World Health Organisation (WHO, 2023) described stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation. Center for Diseases Control and Prevention (CDC, 2024) described stress as how one's body responds to pressures or tension. Stress could be viewed positively or negatively. Positive stress also known as eustress is a response that motivates one to deal with a challenge or accomplish a task. Eustress lead to feelings of satisfaction and accomplishment while



negative stress (distress) causes negative implications such as anxiety, fatigue, depression, unhappiness and other illnesses. Also, stress could be seen as acute, chronic or episodic. (Blumental, 2015; Taylor, 2015). Aafreen et al. (2018) stated that students continuously experience pressure from different sources during academic life, which ultimately causes stress among them. Ajibade et al. (2016) reported that poor socioeconomic status, un conducive learning environment, poor standard of clinical practices as well as age, sex, choice of course, academic year, family size, cultural background and available social support contribute to stress. Thus, Ajibade et al. (2016) further indicated that the students needed to adjust to a new social environment, deal with leaving away from parental authority and heightened academic demands in order to reduce stress. Hung and Care (2018) noted that common stressors among students include academic workload, time pressure, decision making, continuous changes and economic mistakes, failure to succeed academically, financial difficulties, health issues and death of a family member or friend. These stressors tend to impact on the students physically, psychologically, academically and socially, while, Pescoe et al. (2019) noted that stress impact on the students physically, psychologically, academically and socially, all these lead to different disorders, yearning for coping measures.

Coping with stress is a vital tool for human survival. Weiten and Lloyd (2012) noted that coping simply mean to invest one's own conscious effort, to solve personal and interpersonal problems in order to try to master, minimize or tolerate stress and conflict. Yousif et al (2022) defined coping strategies as the behavioural or cognitive approach employed to manage or adapt the response to challenging or stressful situations. Algorani and Gupta (2022) posited that the coping measures employed during stress is very vital to the stressful management of the situation and can assist them to cope. Endler and Parker (1994) identified three main types of coping strategies; task oriented, emotion oriented and avoidance oriented. Berjot and Gillet (2011) identified two main functions of coping to regulate emotions (emotion focused) and to direct behaviour in addressing the problem (problem solving). Emotion focused is directed towards internal states while problem focused is directed towards altering and managing external stressors such as social support and initiating a problem solving behaviours). Stress coping measures are thoughts and behaviours used to manage the internal and external demands of stressful situation (Stephenson & DeLongis, 2020). Coping measures could be adaptive - experimenting, hypothesizing, and adjusting while maladaptive include - alcohol abuse, other substance abuse behaviours (Brown et al., 2005; Carver et al., 2017). Thus, Amiri (2018) noted that exercises, rest, relaxation, eating healthy, leisure time activities, spending time with positive people among others help in coping with stress. For any nation to grow, the stress coping strategies of the students in tertiary institutions of that nation, which is one of the pillars of growth, should be at the fore front.

University students are undergraduates at the university who has not received a first and especially a bachelor's degree. The age range of the undergraduate is 16 years and above. There could be undergraduates between 30 - 40 years who returned to the university to complete a degree because they learned it is essential for the advancement in their profession. Most of the undergraduates are within the age bracket of 16 - 30 years, because they are within this age range, and they possessed both adolescent and adult characteristics such as staying, working, and studying together, loss of interest in parental upbringing, usually unemployed, wish to conform to peer standard, high self-esteem, independence, self-definition, and display self-assertion. (Ogunniyi, 2015). Students proceed to higher level of education; face more stressful events such as tougher syllabus, challenging work assignments and projects, residing in hostels. Such challenges need to be addressed for effective coping. It



is the duty of educators to help their students to cope from such stressors which allow them to have a stable mental health (Kumaraswamy, 2013). Stress helps one to stay alert, to avoid dangerous situations and can keep one motivated. In this study, undergraduates are students of the University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus who has not been awarded a degree certificate, some of the students' characteristics will expose the researchers on their stress coping measures. Certain socio- demographic variables may influence the stress coping measures of undergraduate students.

Gender is one of the variables that may influence the stress coping measures of undergraduates. Matoti and Motshidisi (2016) viewed gender as a psychological term used to describe the behaviour and expected characteristics of individuals who are male or female. Akubue and Okolo (2008) viewed gender as a form of social differentiation, which refers to a socio-cultural distinction between male and female individuals found in a society or community. Cheung et al. (2016) found that male and female students experience stress differently.

Year of study could influence stress coping measures among undergraduates. Year of study is an ordered set of category, intended to group educational programmes in relation to graduation of learning experiences and the knowledge, skills and competencies which each programme is designed to impart (International Standard Classification of Education [ISCED], 2021). Rahman et al. (2013) reported that among students who experience stress, first year students experience stress more than those in other years and this could be because they have fewer experience of school lifestyles. Gender and year of study of undergraduates were studied to find out their association with stress coping strategies.

This study was anchored on health belief model (HBM), propounded by Rosenstock and Becker in 1974. The model states that a person's belief and knowledge in the effectiveness of the recommended health behaviour or action will predict the likelihood that the person will adopt the behaviour or not. It was therefore, relevant to this study, stress coping measures of the students, which mostly is dependent on the adoption of healthy behaviour and avoidance of negative health actions.

Stress has been a global issue due to academic demands, parental economic background, and other activities, which do not allow undergraduates to efficiently concentrate and utilize their time. Undergraduates are expected to practice mindful exercises, have friends to talk to, manage their time, get enough sleep, have rest, eat healthy, take breaks from social activities among others in order to be stress free. These measures will help to inculcate and promote stress coping measures through good practices and also promote physical, social and mental well-being.

Despite the various measures gained from homes and schools regarding stress coping measures, rate of stress has increased in recent times, and so many physical, social, psychological and mental effects like mental illness, depression, slumping, constant head ache, may result due to no or scanty knowledge about stress coping measures. The importance of knowledge of stress and coping measures is to expose one to its resultant effects and avoid further damage and for healthy lifestyle.

Following researchers' findings, stress's negative effects are enormous, it became necessary to ascertain the stress coping measures of undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus, the need, for the present study.

Purpose of the Study

This study assessed the stress coping measures of undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Specifically, the study determined the:



1. stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka;
2. stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on gender; and
3. stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on year of study;.

Research Questions

1. What are the stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka?
2. What are the stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on gender?
3. What are the stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on year of study?

Hypotheses

Two null hypotheses were formulated to guide the study and were tested at .05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the stress coping measures adopted by undergraduates students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on gender.
2. There is no significant difference in the stress coping measures adopted by undergraduate students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on year of study.

Methods

The cross - sectional survey research design was used for the study. The study population consisted of 24,458 undergraduate students of University of Nigeria, Nsukka campus. University of Nigeria, Nsukka (UNN) has four campuses, 15 faculties, 102 academic departments and 82 undergraduate programmes that are offered (Information and Communication Technology, UNN 2021/2022). Due to the undergraduates' characteristics and transition period from secondary school to tertiary school, they become more independent, free to make choices of life to live, combine academic work with paid job, clubbing, partying, over engagement in religious activities among others, which have both short and long term effects linked to stress and depression that may affect the students. The multi- stage sampling procedure was used to arrive at a sample size of 400 undergraduates, which is in line with the suggestion of Cohen et al (2011) guideline that stipulated that when a population is 20,000 and above at 95% confidence level (5% interval), the sample size should be 377 and above. The first stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement to select five faculties out of the 10 faculties in the campus. The second stage involved the use of simple random sampling technique of balloting without replacement to select 10 departments, and the third stage involved the use of convenience sampling to select 40 undergraduates from each of the selected 10 departments, thus 400 undergraduates were used. The instrument for data collection was a structured stress coping measures questionnaire (SCMQ), comprising 17 items both on socio demographic variables and stress coping measures among undergraduate students. The response options for all the response was 'yes and no'. The instrument was validated by three experts from Human Kinetics and Health Education Department, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The reliability of the instrument was established using Split half method

(Spearman’s Brown Correlation coefficient). According to Uzoagulu (2011), Spearman’s Brown formula is used to estimate the internal consistency of an instrument with dichotomously scored item of homogeneous or uniform difficulty. The reliability index of 0.73 was obtained. Cohen et al (2011) positioned that if the correlation coefficient index that is obtained is up to 0.67 and above, the instrument should therefore be deemed reliable for the study. The completed 400 copies of the questionnaire were collated, sorted and checked for completeness of responses, and 397 copies of the instrument were used for the analysis. Frequency and percentages were used to answer the research questions while chi - square statistics was used to test the hypotheses at .05 level of significance.

Results

Table1: Percentage Responses of Stress Coping Measures adopted by Undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (n = 397)

S/ N	Statements	Yes	
		F	%
1	Taking five servings of fruits daily will keep me from experiencing mood swings and light-headedness	210	52.9
2.	Avoid quarreling with other students	348	87.7
3.	Being reasonably organized and to keep a minimalist, soothing study area that’s free of distraction and cluttered	284	71.5
4.	I engage in exercises and other recreational activities	275	69.3
5.	I engage in religious activity such as prayer groups, fellowships when I am stressed	242	61.0
6.	Having enough sleep for about 8 hours every day keeps me away from stress	325	81.9
7.	Staying in a good study environment such as library	238	59.9
8.	I smoke cigarette or marijuana when I am stressed	92	23.2
9.	Having a friend or family member to talk to when I am stressed	325	81.9
1	Having quiet time or meditation	120	30.2
11	Drinking alcohol when stressed out to cool off at least two times a day	316	79.6
		244	61.5
	12. Reading good spiritual and inspirational books		
	13 Listening to mind lifting podcast	280	70.5
	14 Chatting and spending time on social media	319	80.4
	15 Seeking counsel and encouragement from other people such as health educators and psychologist.	246	62.0
	Overall %	327	82.4

Key: 0-39%,- low stress coping measures; 40-69%-moderate stress coping measures; high stress coping measures 70-100%

Results in table 1 show that 82.4 per cent of undergraduates had high stress coping measures.

Table 2: Percentage Responses on Stress Coping Measures adopted by Undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on Gender (n = 397)

S/ N	Statements	Yes			
		Male		Female	
		F	%	F	%
1	Taking five servings of fruits daily will keep me from experiencing mood	114	(55.3)	96	(50.3)



	swings and light-headedness			
2	Avoid quarreling with other students	178 (86.4)	170 (89.0)	
3	Being reasonably organized and to keep a minimalist, soothing study area that's free of distraction and clustered	143 (69.4)	141 (73.8)	
4	Engaging in exercises and other recreational activities	145 (70.4)	130 (68.1)	
5	I engage in religious activity such as prayer groups, fellowships when I am stressed	120 (58.3)	122 (63.9)	
6	Having enough sleep for about 8 hours every day keeps me away from stress	168 (81.6)	157 (82.2)	
7	Staying in a good study environment such as library	135 (65.5)	103 (53.9)	
8	I smoke cigarette or marijuana when I am stressed	57 (27.7)	35 (18.3)	
9	Having a friend or family member to talk to when I am stress	162 (78.6)	154 (80.6)	
0	Having quiet time or meditation	167 (81.1)	158 (82.7)	
	11 Drinking alcohol when stressed out to cool off at least two times a day	80 (38.8)	40 (20.9)	
		116 (56.3)	128 (67.0)	
	12. Reading good spiritual and inspirational books	145 (70.4)	135 (70.7)	
	13 Listening to mind lifting podcast	166 (80.6)	153 (80.1)	
	14 Chatting and spending time on social media			
	15 Seeking counsel and encouragement from other people such as health educators and psychologist.	123 (59.7)	132 (64.4)	
Overall %		166 (80.6)	161 (84.3)	

Key: 0-39%,- low stress coping measures; 40-69%-moderate stress coping measures;70-100%- high stress coping measures

Results in table 2 show that both male and female undergraduates had high stress coping measures (80.6% and 84.3%) respectively. However, female undergraduates had higher stress coping measures more than male; though male undergraduates cope with stress more than females through chatting and spending time on social media as shown in item 14.

Table 3: Percentage Responses on Stress Coping Measures adopted by Undergraduates in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on Year of Study (n = 397)

S / N	Statements	Yes		
		First year	Other y	Final year
		F %	F %	F %
1	Taking five servings of fruits daily will keep me from experiencing mood swings and light-headedness	58 (55.2)	95 (57.6)	49 (25.7)
2	Avoid quarreling with other students	88 (83.8)	176 (91.2)	84 (84.8)
3	Being reasonably organized and to keep a minimalist, soothing study area that's free of distraction and clustered	70 (66.7)	150 (77.7)	64 (64.6)
4	Engaging in exercises and other recreational activities	66 (62.9)	154 (79.8)	55 (55.6)
5	I engage in religious activity such as prayer groups, fellowships when I am stressed	62 (59.0)	129 (66.8)	51 (51.5)
6	Having enough sleep for about 8 hours every day keeps me away from stress	83 (79.0)	180 (82.9)	82 (82.8)
7	Staying in a good study environment such as library	70 (66.7)	112 (56.0)	56 (56.6)
8	I smoke cigarette or marijuana when I am stressed	25 (23.8)	39 (20.2)	28 (28.3)
9	Having a friend or family member to talk to when I am stress	80 (76.2)	162 (83.0)	74 (74.7)



10	Having quiet time or meditation	88 (83.8)	261 (80.4)	76 (76.8)
	11 Drinking alcohol when stressed out to cool off at least two times a day	33 (31.4)	46 (23.8)	41 (41.4)
	12. Reading good spiritual and inspirational books	63 (60.0)	123 (63.7)	58 (58.6)
	13 Listening to mind lifting podcast	64 (60.0)	153 (79.3)	63 (63.6)
	14 Chatting and spending time on social media	77 (73.3)	166 (86.0)	76 (76.8)
	15 Seeking counsel and encouragement from other people such as health educators and psychologist.	61 (58.1)	131 (67.9)	54 (54.5)
	Overall %	85 (81.0)	169 (87.6)	73 (73.7)

Results in table 3 show the overall stress coping measures among undergraduates was high. Furthermore, higher percentage was found in other years (87.6%) followed by undergraduates in first years(81.0%) and those in final year (73.7%).

Table 4: Summary of no significant difference in the Stress Coping Measures among Undergraduate in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on Gender and Year of Study

Items	True O(E)	False O(E)	χ^2	df	p-value
Male	166 (169.7)	40 (36.3)	940	1	.332
Female	161 (157)	30 (33.7)			
First year	85 (86.5)	20 (18.5)			
Other Years	169 (159.0)	24 (34.0)	8.811	2	.012
Final Year	73 (81.5)	26 (17.5)			

Results in table 4 show the Pearson Chi - square value with corresponding p - value for hypotheses of no significant difference in the stress coping measures of undergraduate of UNN based on gender ($\chi^2= 940$, $p = .332 > 0.05$) was not significant (not rejected), and year of study ($\chi^2=8.811$, $p = .012 < 0.05$) was significant (rejected). Since the p - value for gender was greater than 0.05 level of significance, the null hypotheses was therefore the hypothesis was not rejected, while the p-value for year of study was not greater than 0.05, thus, the null hypothesis was therefore rejected. These imply that there was no significant difference in the stress coping measures of undergraduate in UNN based on gender, while there was significant difference in the stress coping measures based on year of study.

Discussion

The findings in table 1 showed that undergraduate students had high stress coping measures. The finding was expected and not surprising because students have passed through primary and secondary schools, were taught subjects such as social studies, civic education, and basic science among others on topics related to stress and coping measures. Students are expected to apply the coping measures learnt in their high schools in their tertiary institution



and therefore, may adopt those measures. The finding was in line with the finding of Oduwarije et al. (2017) who found high level of stress coping measures among college students. The implication of the finding was that the high level of stress coping measures knowledge will go a long way to prepare the undergraduates for future positive living in the larger society, thus, promote effective national growth and development.

The findings in table 2 showed that undergraduate female and male students had high stress coping measures respectively. The result was expected because stress whether negative or positive occurs in individuals irrespective of gender. Also undergraduates are within late adolescence mostly, moving to early adulthood, may like to experiment on certain things that may predispose them to stress. The finding was expected since the undergraduate are both genders, who are inquisitive to experimentation (finding out things) in life. There was no significant difference in the stress coping measures among undergraduates based on gender which implies that stress coping measures adopted vary according to gender by the undergraduates

Also, findings showed that, students in other years had higher stress coping measures, more than first year and final year. The finding was expected and therefore not surprising, because older undergraduates were supposed to have adapted and got familiar with their school environment and learnt more than the younger undergraduates who just got admitted and final years who may be struggling with their projects, clearance among others. The finding agrees with the findings of Morento et al. (2024) and Defeyter et al. (2021) who noted that stress responses varied by the year of study. There was significant difference in the stress coping measures among undergraduates based on year of study, which implies that stress coping measures adopted do not vary based on year of study.

Conclusion

The study assessed stress coping measures among undergraduate in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The findings showed that undergraduates had overall high stress coping measures. The finding also showed that undergraduate reported high stress coping measures according to gender and year of study. Undergraduates may not involve themselves much in negative behaviours (vices) such as suicide, violence, among others, because their coping strategies were high. However, curriculum developers should enrich the school curriculum with the appropriate strategies which will be suitable for all undergraduates as may be suggested by relevant stake holders, such as psychologists, counselors among others, for intense teaching and learning of stress and coping measures. Also, screen time activities otherwise called browsing, and its' attendant risks should be exposed to students especially the males to avoid stress.

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