



## Status of Stress and Coping Strategies among Sandwich Students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

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### Abstract

*The study investigated status of stress and coping strategies among sandwich students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Two research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. A descriptive cross-sectional survey design was adopted. The population of the study consisted of 3,200 sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Proportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to select 640 sandwich students for the study. The instrument for data collection was a self-structured Questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while one-way Analysis of Variance was used to test the null hypotheses at .05 level of significance. Findings of the study revealed that some sources of stress experienced by sandwich students apply to a high level while sandwich students utilize and adopt the coping strategies to a high extent more than the others. Male and female sandwich students significantly differed in their level of stress and did not differ in the extent of their use of coping strategies for stress. However, special public sensitization programmes, seminars and workshops on emotional health issues should be organized at more regular intervals for sandwich students, especially to those with higher pre-dispositions and also to create more awareness on the consequences of stress, ways of coping with stress and avoiding stressors.*

**Keywords:** Stress, Coping, Coping Strategies, Sandwich Students, University of Nigeria Nsukka

### Introduction

Stress is one of the hassles that come with the day to day lives of undergraduate students especially the sandwich students. Stress has been identified as a 20th-century disease that is viewed as a complex and dynamic transaction between individuals and their environment (Dahlin et al., 2005). It is a perceived concept caused by anything that one feels as an imbalance to the harmony of life (Mohamed & Ahmed, 2012). Stress which happened to be an emotional health problem can affect one or more of three important areas, namely, social or family relations; leisure time activities; work or occupational activities such as academic work (World Health organization [WHO], 2001). A report from the British Association for Counseling and Psychotherapy states that stress-induced emotional imbalance has been on the rise during the past few decades among the student population (Al-Sowryh, 2013).

With the increase in demand for quality education in our society, sandwich students are faced with the increasing pressure that comes with meeting up with the demand of the society. This challenging situation of stress in higher education institution has become a global issue, which is distressing to undergraduate students especially the sandwich students because of their peculiarities. High levels of stress over time are both physically and emotionally demanding and can increase the risk of negative health outcomes such as heart disease and respiratory illness (Salvagioni et al., 2017), as well as emotional outcomes, including depression and anxiety (Shin et al., 2013; Steinherdt, Smith, Faulk, & Gloria, 2011). Therefore, to study stress and identify its sources and coping strategies is necessary for the sake of quality education.

Stress has been viewed variously from several perspectives. According to the American Institute of Stress, stress is defined as a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demand exceeds the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize (Kain, 2014). Stress may be defined as any factor acting externally or internally, which makes adaptation to environment difficult and which induces increased effort on the part of the individual to maintain a state of equilibrium between self and external environment (Richlin-Kinsky & Hoe, 2013). Stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or suspense and it affects individuals irrespective of the developmental stage (Banerjee & Chatterjee, 2012). It can also be accepted that stress refers to the exposure of the body to much work in which the body experiences difficulty to cope. Individuals in the academic environment are also exposed to stress; this kind of stress is referred to as academic stress.

Academic stress refers to the unpleasant situations that occur due to the many demands made on the sandwich students or learners in the form of examination, maintaining health and academic lives, competing with peers, meeting the academic expectations of lecturers as well as the individual's academic expectations. Bisht (as cited in Lal, 2014), defined academic stress as demands related to academic environment that tax or exceed the

available resources (internal or external) as cognitively viewed by the sandwich students involved. According to the author, academic stress reflects perceptions of an individual's academic frustration, academic conflict, academic pressure and academic anxiety. Bisht further defined the four components of academic stress as follows: Academic frustration is a state of harm of some academic goals, academic conflict results from two or more incompatible responds to academic goals, academic pressure occurs when a student is under heavy demand of time and energy to meet academic goals and academic anxiety is an expression of apprehension of harm to academic goals (La, 2014).

There is a discrepancy between stress and stressors. Lehrer, David, Barlow, Woolfolk and Sime (2007) differentiated between stress and a stressor. In their view a stressor is an agent or stimulus that causes stress. Stress is the feeling one has when under pressure, while stressors are the things one respond to in an environment. Examples of stressors are noise, unpleasant people, a speeding car, or even going out on a first date. Generally, (but not always), the more stressors one experiences the more stressed one feels (Lehrer et al., 2007). Contrary to popular belief, stress is not the pressure from work or pressure from outside, such as: divorce, death, vacation or isolation, these are stressors. A person's response to those situations constitutes stress. Stress has been grouped into various categories.

Stress has been variously categorized. Chang (2011) grouped stress into emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioral forms of stress. Emotional forms of stress include: becoming easily agitated, frustrated and moody, and having difficulty relaxing and quieting one's mind. Physical symptoms of stress are headache, stomach upset, aches, pains, and tense muscles, insomnia, loss of sexual desire and nervousness. Cognitive symptoms of stress include: constant worrying, forgetfulness and disorganization, inability to focus and poor judgment. Finally, behavioral symptoms of stress are changes in appetite and increased use of alcohol, drugs or cigarettes. A lot of writers on the subject of stress have identified various signs and symptoms of stress.

In this study, however, the identifications by Alberti (2005) and Jarvis (2005) have sufficed. The authors listed broadly the following as the signs and symptoms of stress: Tension, faster heartbeat, anxiety, fear, the need to urinate frequently, pale face, the need for more sleep, headache, insomnia, sweaty hands and feet, high blood pressure, heart disease, backache, impaired vision, poor problem solving, reduced work performance, stomach disorder, tense muscles, and impaired decision making. Despite all these, the sandwich students can still cope.

Coping can be understood as a process that is key in managing challenging situations. Coping refers to the mental and behavioral efforts needed in handling life situations (Soderstrom, Dolbier, Leiferman, & Steinhardt, 2000). In this process, the individual including the sandwich student makes a cognitive and behavioral effort to manage both external and internal sources of stress (Vaisanen et al., 2018). Coping strategies refer to the specific efforts that people use to master, reduce, tolerate or minimize stressful events. According to Folksman and Lazarus in Al-Sowaygh (2013), coping is defined as a cognitive and behavioral effort taken by individuals to try to either alleviate or appreciate the requirements creating the disparity between the person and the co-existing environment. Their primary suggestion included in-depth analysis of the determinants leading to stress and their strategic management protocols. The authors envisioned coping as being either problem-focused or emotion focused.

Problem focused coping strategies include active problem solving techniques to handle the cause of the stress between the sandwich student and his or her environment (Compass et al., 2001). Some of such strategies include; confronting (taking up the struggle to change an adverse situation), seeking social support (trying to acquire emotional and informational supports from others), and planned problem solving (problem-based attempts for solving an undesired situation). On the other hand, emotional based strategies are those through which a sandwich student reaches an optimized level of emotional modification as well as the ability to deal with intense and critical conditions and feelings (Azizi, 2011). Its intended or aimed at reinterpreting and understanding the stressor differently.

Problem focused coping methods, acts as a mental stress originator. Studies has shown that sandwich students who use coping strategies (strategies for dealing with problems either emotion-based or problem-based) experience less negative emotions compared to those who apply avoidance strategies (Odonogio, 2004). Ultimately, the etiology of this pandemic stress among sandwich students requires evaluation for complexity and eradication in the near future. Apparently, the efficacy of the coping modality adopted depends on the perception of the sandwich student to stress and his or her inherent desire for quality of life.

Sandwich students comprise of various categories of people which include: teachers, workers, farmers and entrepreneurs. Combining educational stress with occupational stress can be very demanding, as a result of this, many sandwich students suffer from accumulated stress which affects both their academics and occupational life. Work-related stress has been defined by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) as harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers (NIOSH, 2008). Sandwich students are majorly elderly men and



women who didn't have the opportunity to attend the normal regular school. They are undergraduates with a difference. Their sensitive nature affects everything about them including the way they think, dress and even relate with each other. The sandwich students are faced with so much stress; this is as a result of the need to survive in the academic environment within a limited time. Despite being faced with stress in the academic environment, family and occupational stress are not left out thus, leading to a very high accumulation of stress. These accumulations of stress pose a great challenge to their assimilation process, thus leading to poor academic performance in most cases. The high demand that comes with being a sandwich student cannot be compared to being a normal undergraduate student.

Successful coping can buffer against the negative effects of environmental stressors with the academic environment, whereas poor coping may exacerbate these effects. Coping strategies may directly address the source of stress or may help a person tolerate the experience of stress (Kyriacou, 2001; Montgomery & Rupp, 2005). Effective use of coping can lead to more positive emotional outcomes and thus stress coping strategy is important to understand along with stress from a preventive perspective. Earlier studies evaluating stress were largely limited to documenting perceived stress, sources of stress or coping strategies among undergraduate students, thus necessitating this study. This study tends to determine ways sandwich students can cope with stress.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The general purpose of this study was to determine the stress and stress coping strategies among Sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Specifically, this study aimed to determine:

1. level of stress among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka; and
2. extent of use of coping strategies among sandwich students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the level of stress among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka?
2. What is the extent of use of coping strategies among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka?

### **Hypotheses**

1. There is no significant difference in the level of stress among male and female sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.
2. There is no significant difference in the extent of use of coping strategies among male and female sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka.

### **Materials and Methods**

The study adopted a descriptive cross-sectional survey research design. The design was used in this study to determine the stress and stress coping strategies among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The population of the study consisted of 3,200 sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. A sample of 640 was drawn for the study. Proportionate stratified random sampling was used to select respondents from the faculties of Education and Vocational and Technical Education (VTE), departments of Statistics and Public Administration and Local Government Studies.

The instrument was face validated by five experts from departments of Human Kinetics and Health Education, Social Work and Psychology all from the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The instrument consisted of 13-items grouped into three sections A, B and C respectively. Sections A and C were developed by the researcher based on literature, whereas section B was adapted from literature. The instrument was further subjected to reliability test using Cronbach's Alpha. An internal consistency of .78 was obtained and adjudged reliable for use in the study. Instructions on how to fill the questionnaire were given to the subjects and the subjects were given time to respond to the questionnaire. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while one-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the null hypotheses at the 0.05 level of significance.

**Results**

**Table 1: Mean Responses of Sandwich Students' Level of Sources of Stress in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka (n=595)**

Categories of Stress	$\bar{x}$	Std.Dev	Decision
Conflicts in personal relationships with lecturers	4.11	3.11	HE
Lack or low-level of support from family	1.29	1.67	VLE
Excessive workload/ too much responsibility	4.22	1.42	HE
Limited time to meet up with schoolwork	3.55	1.55	HE
<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>3.29</b>	<b>1.94</b>	<b>HE</b>

**Key: 1.00 – 1.00 = Low Level; 2.00-2.99 = Moderate Level; 3.00-3.99 = High Level**

Table 1 reveals that overall; sandwich students had high level of stress. Also, the table shows that the three sources of stress “conflicts in personal relationships ( $\bar{x} = 4.11$ ); excessive workload or too much responsibility ( $\bar{x} = 4.22$ ); and limited time to meet up with schoolwork ( $\bar{x}=3.55$ ) apply to a high level among sandwich students.

**Table 2: Mean Responses of Sandwich Students' Extent of Use of Coping Strategies for Stress in University of Nigeria, Nsukka (n=595)**

Coping strategies for Stress	$\bar{x}$	Std. Dev	Decision
Engaging in thought stopping (i.e. detecting and stopping ideas that precede negative motion or feeling)	4.12	0.66	H.E
Reflecting on the past with serenity, making cost benefit analysis of negative feelings, talking oneself down and thinking about failures as opportunities.	4.20	1.22	H.E
Engaging in leisure/recreational programmes	3.21	0.76	M.E
Avoiding magnifying personal faults /explaining one failure realistically	1.12	0.72	V.L.E
Engaging in religious activity and or adopting a positive outlook to life with a belief that a misfortune reaches an end	3.51	1.03	H.E
Avoiding lashing out at others (e.g. Angry at others, physical violence).	3.40	0.68	M.E
Having enough sleep, rest and relaxation	4.04	1.16	H.E
Sharing with others/off-loading to or telling a friend who will help	2.24	0.86	L.E
<b>Cluster</b>	<b>3.23</b>	<b>.886</b>	<b>HE</b>

**Key: 1.00 – 1.00 = Low Extent; 2.00-2.99 = Moderate Extent; 3.00-3.99 = High Extent**

Table 2 indicates that overall; sandwich students to a high extent adopt the coping strategies for stress. Engaging in thought stopping ( $\bar{x}= 4.12$ ); reflecting on the past with serenity ( $\bar{x}= 4.20$ ); engaging in religious activity and or adopting a positive outlook to life ( $\bar{x}=3.51$ ) and having enough sleep, rest and relaxation ( $\bar{x} = 4.04$ ) are coping strategies used to a high extent by sandwich students. The Table further shows that engaging in leisure/recreational programmes ( $\bar{x} = 3.21$ ) and avoiding lashing out at others (e.g. angry outburst and physical violence) ( $\bar{x} = 3.4$ ) are coping strategies used to a moderate extent by sandwich students. Also, sharing with others/off-loading to or telling a friend who will help ( $\bar{x} = 2.24$ ) is utilized to a low extent.

**Table 3: Summary of One-way ANOVA for Level of Stress among Male and Female Sandwich Students in the University of Nigeria, Nigeria (n=595)**

Category	Source of variance	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Stress	Between groups	30.338	1	30.338	5.60	.018*
	Within groups	3212.647	593	5.418		
	<b>Total</b>	<b>32.42.985</b>	<b>594</b>			

\*Significant at  $p < .05$

One-way ANOVA in Table 3 revealed a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between male and female sandwich students on level of stress among sandwich students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka. The null hypothesis was therefore rejected ( $F, 1,593 = 5.60, p = .018$ ). This implies that male and female sandwich students differed in their level of stress.

**Table 4: Summary of ANOVA for Extent of Use of Coping Strategies for Stress among Sandwich Students in University of Nigeria, Nsukka based on Gender (n=595)**

Variable	Source of variance	Sum of squares	df	Mean square	F	Sig.
Coping strategies	Between groups	1.951	1	1.951	.12	.732
Gender	Within groups	9843.619	593	16.600		
	Cluster	9845.570	594			

One-way ANOVA in Table 4 indicated no significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between male and female sandwich students on extent of use of coping strategies for stress among sandwich students. The null hypothesis was therefore not rejected ( $F, 1, 593 = .12, p = .732$ ). This implies that male and female sandwich students did not differ in the extent of their use of coping strategies for stress.

### Discussion of Findings

Based on the analysis and interpretation of data, the following are the findings of the study. Table 1 reveals that three sources of stress “conflicts in personal r/ships; excessive workload or too much responsibility; and limited time to meet up with school work apply to a high level among sandwich students. This was expected and not surprising because these items pose a problem to the emotional and mental wellbeing of the sandwich students. This is in line with the findings of Vaisanen et al. (2018), he stated that excessive workload affects the academic performance of students. Also, the findings lends support from the position of Alosaimi et al. (2015) who stated that there is high prevalence of the sources of stress among students. The sandwich students are faced with various sources of stress on a daily basis.

The study also revealed the extent of use of coping strategies among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Results in Table 2 indicated that four items “engaging in thought stopping; reflecting on the past with serenity; engaging in religious activity and or adopting a positive outlook to life and having enough sleep, rest and relaxation are coping strategies used to a high extent by sandwich students. The results were expected and not surprising as these activities are subtle in nature and could easily be adopted without attracting undue attention from people. The finding agrees with that of Sedgeman (2005) who reported that rest, sleep and relaxation, thought stopping, talking down oneself and thinking about failures as opportunities are subtle but effective ways of coping with stress. This is also in line with the findings of Al-Sowygh (2013), where the author stated that stress coping strategies were used effectively by students.

However, gender made a significant difference in the levels of stress among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Results in Table 3 revealed a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) between male and female sandwich students on levels of stress ( $F, 593=5.60$ ). The null hypothesis on the influence of sandwich student gender on the levels of stress among sandwich students was therefore rejected. This was expected and not surprising because female sandwich students are faced with a higher level of stress more than their male counterpart. This is in line with the findings of Al-Sowygh (2013) who reported that there is a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the levels of stress among male and female students.

However, gender made no significant differences in the extent of use of coping strategies for stress among sandwich students in the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Results in Table 4 indicated no significant difference ( $p > .05$ ) between male and female sandwich students on extent of use of coping strategies for stress among sandwich students. This is surprising and unexpected. This is contradictory to the findings of Al-Sowygh (2013), he stated that there is a significant difference ( $p = 0.017$ ) in the use of coping strategies among male and female students. Also, Hussain et al. (2019) reported that there was a significant difference ( $p < .05$ ) in the extent of use of coping strategies between male and female respondents. The female sandwich students tend to use stress coping strategies more than their male counterpart because of the fact that men are more stoic than women.

### Conclusion

The findings have shown that overall; sandwich students had high level of stress. The three sources of stress “conflicts in personal relationships; excessive workload or too much responsibility; and limited time to meet up with school work apply to a high level among sandwich students. Overall; sandwich students to a high extent adopt the coping strategies for stress. Engaging in thought stopping; reflecting on the past with serenity; engaging in religious activity and or adopting a positive outlook to life and having enough sleep, rest and relaxation are coping strategies used to a high extent by sandwich students. Engaging in leisure/recreational programmes and avoiding lashing out at others (e.g. angry outburst and physical violence) are coping strategies used to a moderate extent by sandwich students. Also, sharing with others/off-loading to or telling a friend who will help is utilized



to a low extent. Male and female sandwich students significantly differed in their level of stress and did not differ in the extent of their use of coping strategies for stress. The results of the study have empirically proven the efficacy of coping strategies in managing the stressful situations (stressors) experienced by sandwich students in the workplace. Therefore,

### Recommendations

1. Stress management programs should be delivered by an education professional, as self-help, or as part of a university curriculum.
2. Special public sensitization programmes, seminars and workshops on emotional health issues should be organized at more regular intervals for sandwich students, especially to those with higher pre-dispositions and also to create more awareness of the consequences of stress and ways of avoiding stressors.
3. Special public sensitization programmes, seminars and workshops on emotional health issues should be organized at more regular intervals for sandwich students, especially to those with higher pre-dispositions and also ,to create more awareness of the consequences of stress and ways of avoiding stressors.
4. The student body should create forums that will serve as an avenue in enabling the sandwich students to interact effectively with peers and also relief some stress in the process.

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