



Impact of Academic Stress and Coping Strategies among Senior Secondary School Students in Kaduna State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

The study explored the impact of academic stress and coping strategies among senior secondary school students. It was guided by two research questions and two null hypotheses. The study was a descriptive survey research design. Stratified random sampling and simple random sampling techniques were employed to obtain a sample difference of 300 students in Kaduna Central Senatorial District of Kaduna State, Nigeria. An instrument titled, “Academic Stress and Coping Scale for Students” (ASCSS) was used for data collection, after its validation by experts from the Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha method which yielded a coefficient value of 0.77. The research questions were answered using means and standard deviations. The null hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance using t-test statistic. Results revealed significant between academic stress of male and female students and no significant difference in academic stress of rural and urban location school students. Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that parents should help their children to develop strategies for coping with academic stress whenever they occurred and students that have more academic stress should be guided by teachers, parents and school counsellors.

Keywords: Academic stress, Coping strategies, School, Students, Secondary

INTRODUCTION

Stress is an uncomfortable feeling experienced by individuals that is too demanding and a threat to their well-being especially, when such demands exceed the personal and social resources the individuals are able to mobilize (Nordqvist, 2017). These feelings called stressors cut across all ages. Students of senior secondary schools go through crowded events which involve studies and extracurricular activities that take a toll on their physical, emotional and academic performance. When these events take place, they become disorganised, disoriented and therefore less able to cope with their academic work. Students who experience such academic stressful life events often have worse health outcomes and reduced quality of life (Essel & Owusu, 2017; Sonia, 2015).

Academic stress symptoms include but not limited to lack of energy, engaging in self-medication, high blood pressure, feeling depressed, trouble concentrating and restlessness (Nagle & Sharma, 2018). A student experiencing any of these symptoms is likely to be a victim of stress. The negative effects of academic stress on students may vary from one student to another based on their previous encounters and coping strategies applied to debunk them.

Stressors for senior secondary school students are compounded because at this level of their development, they are fast developing the skills to deal with life stresses and are going through many physical, emotional and social changes. As they mature, they encounter crises, which may affect their academic, physical, social, emotional and psychological development (Sonia, (2015).

Causes of academic stress include stress due to teachers, stress due to exams and test, stress due to peer, stress due to parental and social, stress due to time management and infrastructure, and stress due to self-

inflicted factors (Abiola, Lawal & Habib, 2015). These can arise from different school based sources of stress, such as school work, discipline and classroom management procedure, extracurricular activities, and public performance. Nakpodia (2012); Akande, Olowonirejuaro, & Okwara-Kalu (2014); Onukwufor & Izuchi (2017) have identified the following stressors especially, among senior secondary school students:

- i. Academics-The worry about academic performance can cause stress symptoms such as anxiety, insomnia or changes in your appetite and overall mood. The fear of examinations does create stress among students.;
- ii. Finances – Students experience stress when they do not have money to maintain their lifestyles and fulfill their academic needs. If they fail to fulfill the requirement, then it creates a stress;
- iii. Relationships– Students wants to have friends, whether they are close friends or just acquaintances. When they are unable to do so or they become depressed and stressed;
- iv. Time Management-A lack of time management among students can cause them stress.

The impacts of stress on students brings about poor academic performance, reduced initiative skills in tackling academic problems as well as creating confusion in their minds especially, when study schedules in schools appear challenging (Essel & Owusu, 2017). The act of combining a busy life along with education causes stress and depression. Limited stress is beneficial and can lead to excellent performance. However, uncontrolled stress can lead to exhaustion, depression and several other vices. Students often experience stress when examinations are around the corner, which is a litmus test for their ability to cope and adapt to the situation they find themselves in. Academic stress affecting students also leads them to have bad performance in school work due to lack of concentration (Samson-Akpan, John, Edet & Uka, 2017). In the long term, stress can even affect their future because it can generate a confused atmosphere of uncertainties for them. Under the influence of stress, most students easily forget what they have been taught. The ultimate effect is therefore, poor academic performance in schools.

Coping is the ability to appraise a stressful situation in order to regain balance and develop the power to conquer new challenges (Nagle & Sharma, 2018). In order to attain this level, it is necessary to set cognitive and behavioural efforts that would ensure that they are achieved and sustained. Students utilize many coping strategies such as diversion, smoking and drinking, relaxation, self-reliance, avoidance, praying, day dreaming, listening to music. Coping strategies are known to influence an individuals' experience of stress. Students are being pressured frequently by a variety of factors which cause them to have stress in many ways (Delahaij, Van Dam, Gaillard & Soeters, (2011). For most students, managing stress can be extremely challenging. Learning how to manage stress may help students to cope with every day social and academic pressures, and thus have a better education. Coping strategies are labeled as either emotion-focused or problem-focused. Emotion-focused coping involves regulating emotional response to a stressor and reducing psychological discomfort, while problem-focused coping includes altering the situation to minimize or eliminate the source of the stressor.

MacArthur (2014) further categorized coping strategies into active and avoidant coping strategies. Active coping strategies are either behavioral or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself, while avoidant coping strategies lead students into activities that keep them from directly addressing stressful events (Samson-Akpan, John, Edet and Uka, 2017; Onoyase, 2015). It is evident that active coping strategies, whether behavioral or emotional, are thought to be better ways to deal with stressful events, and avoidant coping strategies appear to be a psychological risk factor or marker for adverse responses to stressful life event. The stress experienced by students can be influenced by the coping strategies they choose to employ. Successful coping strategies help students to perform markedly better in regards to their studies as well as aid in relieving their stress (Khater, AkhuZaheya & Shaban, 2014). In summary, coping with stress for students is a dynamic and ongoing process, aimed at survival and growth. Using various coping strategies whether healthy or unhealthy, the imbalance and disequilibrium is restored (Nancy, 2011; Anyanwu, Ezegbe, Enyi, Etonyeaku and Chijioko, 2017)

The purpose of the current study was to explore the impacts of academic stress and coping strategies among senior secondary school students. The specific objectives of the study were to find out the:

- i. gender difference on academic stress among senior secondary school students;
- ii. difference of academic stress between rural and urban senior secondary school students.

Research Questions

- i. What is the gender difference on academic stress among senior secondary school students?
- ii. What is the difference of academic stress between rural and urban senior secondary school students?

Research Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant gender difference in academic stress among senior secondary school students.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in academic stress between rural and urban senior secondary school students.

METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey research design was employed for the study. The population for the study comprised all public senior secondary school students in Kaduna Central Senatorial District of Kaduna State, Nigeria, while sample for the study consisted of 300 students drawn from ten senior secondary schools through stratified random sampling.

The instrument for the study was a researcher–designed questionnaire titled, “Academic Stress and Coping Scale for Students” (ASCSS) which was used for data collection. It was validated by three experts in the Faculty of Education, Nasarawa State University, Keffi, Nigeria. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha and the coefficient obtained was 0.78, signifying that it was reliable for administration. Descriptive statistics in the form of mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while, t-test was employed to test the research hypotheses at alpha=0.5.

RESULTS

Research Question One: *What is the gender difference on academic stress among senior secondary school students?*

Table 1: Mean and Standard Deviation of Academic Stress Scores Based on Gender

| Gender | N | Mean | S.D. | t-value | Sig at 0.05 |
|--------|-----|-------|-------|---------|-------------|
| Male | 159 | 95.79 | 31.23 | 0.63 | Not Sig. |
| Female | 141 | 93.19 | 29.97 | | |

Table 1 shows there is no significant difference between the male and female respondents. However, with reference to the mean scores, male students scored higher.

Research Question Two: *What is the difference of academic stress between rural and urban senior secondary school students?*

Table 2: Mean and Standard Deviation of Academic Stress Scores for Rural and Urban Students

| Location | N | Mean | S.D. | t-value | Sig at 0.05 |
|----------|-----|-------|-------|---------|-------------|
| Rural | 178 | 97.34 | 34.90 | 0.58 | Not Sig. |
| Urban | 122 | 99.64 | 32.64 | | |

Table 2 shows there is no significant difference between the rural and urban students. However, with reference to the mean scores, male students scored higher.

Hypotheses Testing

Ho₁: There is no significant gender difference in academic stress among senior secondary school students.

Table 3: Academic Stress between Male and Female Students

| Categories | N | Mean | S.D. | t-Ratio |
|------------|-----|--------|-------|---------|
| Male | 172 | 160.32 | 31.22 | 4.78 |
| Female | 128 | 116.25 | 34.20 | |

Table 3 shows a highly significant difference between academic stress of male and female students ($t=4.78$) at 0.05 level of significance thus, the null hypothesis, “There is no significant difference between academic stress of male and female students” is rejected. It also shows that male students had higher mean academic stress ($M=160.32$) than female students ($M=116.25$).

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in academic stress between rural and urban senior secondary school students.

Table 4: Comparison of academic stress between rural and urban location school students

| Categories | N | Mean | S.D. | t- Ratio |
|------------|-----|--------|-------|----------|
| Urban | 124 | 109.95 | 35.47 | -2.08 |
| Rural | 176 | 156.48 | 31.90 | |

Table 4 shows $t= -2.08$ which is not significant implying that the null hypothesis that “there is no significant difference in academic stress of rural and urban location school students” is accepted. It also shows that the mean score of academic stress of urban location school students (109,95) is higher than that of rural location school students (156.48)

DISCUSSION

The finding of this study showed that there was no significant difference between the male and female respondents regarding academic stress though male students had more academic stress than female students This is in consonance with the findings of Onukwufor & Izuchi (2017); Chen, Wu, Yi, Li, Eshita, Qin, Chen, & Sun (2013) who found that there was significant difference between male and female students stress.

Another finding of this study showed that there was no significant difference in academic stress between rural and urban location school students. This lays credence to the finding of a research by Onukwufor & Izuchi (2017) also found that there was no significant difference between urban and rural secondary school students’ stress.

CONCLUSION

The current study showed that academic stress is a serious challenge to senior secondary school students irrespective of their location (rural or urban). It also demonstrated that male students had higher level of academic stress than female students. The impacts of academic stress can therefore, lead to mental problems and even suicides among senior secondary school students especially when unchecked or nabbed at the right bud.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, it was recommended that:

- i. Parents should help their children to develop strategies for coping with academic stress whenever they occur;
- ii. Students that have more academic stress should be guided by teachers, parents and school counsellors. Their efforts should help the students to reduce their academic stress and improve their academic performance.

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