

STRESS COPING STRATEGIES OF 2012/2013 FINAL YEAR SANDWICH STUDENTS OF THE DEPARTMENT OF BASIC EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF EDUCATION, WINNEBA (UEW), GHANA

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ABSTRACT: *The study sought to investigate the type of stress that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, experience most and the type of coping strategies they adopt in managing stress. Four hundred and fifty-three (453) final year students were purposively sampled for the study. However, four hundred and six (406) students were used for the analysis because they correctly filled and returned their questionnaire. The questionnaire used to collect the data for the study was adapted from Carver, Scheier and Weintraub (1989). The findings from the study revealed that 56.6% of the respondents mostly experience acute stress, 28.6% mostly experienced chronic stress while 14.8% mostly experienced episodic stress. The study also showed that restraint coping strategy (mean=4.07, standard deviation=0.95) was always used as a problem-focused coping strategy while positive reinterpretation and growth(mean=4.15, standard deviation=0.91) was always used as an emotion-focused coping strategy. It was found out that the students used more of problem-focused strategies (mean of means=3.53, standard deviation=1.03) in managing stress than emotion-focused strategies (mean of means=3.27, standard deviation=1.10). It is recommended among other things that the Counselling Unit of UEW, Ghana, in collaboration with the various faculties should organize regular seminars and workshops on Time Management and Stress Management for sandwich students in UEW. Again, the Sports Directorate of the University should formulate programmes on physical exercises and sporting activities that will benefit sandwich students in managing stress situations they go through while on campus.*

KEYWORDS: Sandwich Students, Acute Stress, Chronic Stress, Episodic Stress, Problem-Focused Strategy, Emotion-Focused Strategy.

INTRODUCTION

Stress, which comes in several forms, and seen as the term used to describe the physical, emotional, cognitive, and behavioural responses to events that are appraised as threatening or challenging, is a normal part of life and affects people all over the world not withstanding ones race, colour or ethnicity, professional or academic background (Ciccarelli & White, 2009). This means that stress has many causes, and the degree of stress in our lives is greatly dependent on varied but numerous factors including the physical health of the individual, the quality of our interpersonal relationships, the number of commitments and responsibilities, the degree of others' dependence on one and expectations of us, the amount of support we receive from others and the number of changes of traumatic events we go through in our lives (Anspaugh, Hamrick

& Rosato, 2003). Thus, life is stress-related and it depends on the lifestyle and level of cultural development of the individual.

Some degree of stress is experienced by most people daily, and students are even more likely to face situations and events that require of them to make changes and adapt their behaviour. Thus, students (regular and sandwich students) at all levels experience some forms of stress depending on their academic workload and environment (Esia-Donkoh, Yelkpieri and Esia-Donkoh, 2011). Assignments given to students, studying for quizzes and end of semester examination, interpersonal relationships, responsibilities shouldered by students, and trying to meet deadlines are instances that are likely to cause a student to experience stress. By the nature of the sandwich programme at the University of Education, Winneba (UEW), Ghana, students who pursue their academic programmes through the sandwich sessions are overloaded with academic work. This results in such students generally experiencing one form of stress or the other since they use eight weeks for their academic semester instead of the sixteen weeks used by the regular students. This implies that the semester activities for sandwich students of UEW are likely to result in stressful situations considering the limited time they use to complete a semester's work.

It is a truism that majority of these sandwich students are relatively old, and also married; hence, they take advantage of any opportunity to travel home to attend to family needs. It is therefore common to see some of the students skipping lectures and also not writing quizzes. In trying to adjust to the academic environment of UEW, and life at Winneba generally, sandwich students encounter a lot of challenges resulting in these students, including those in the Department of Basic Education exhibiting stress-induced behaviours, and numerous complaints about headaches, sleeplessness, fatigue, high blood pressure and loss of appetite which are some of the symptoms of stress (UEW Clinic, 2013). The study was therefore to investigate how 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, coped with the stressful situations they found themselves in while on campus to pursue their academic programme. The study sought to answer the following questions:

1. Which type of stress is experienced more often by 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana?
2. What strategies do 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana use in coping with the stress they experience on campus?
3. To what extent are the coping strategies of 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, more problem-focused or emotion-focused?

The study is important because the findings will bring to the notice of the Management of UEW about the type of stress final year sandwich students in the Department of Basic Education, UEW mostly experience, and the strategies they use in coping with the stressful situations they go through. This will help the university to strengthen the content of the orientation programme organized for the sandwich students. Again, the findings of the study will be beneficial to the UEW management, Counseling Unit, and Amalgamated Sports and Clubs Committee to improve on the various counseling services, and physical/sporting activities to assist the students. Finally, the findings from the study will contribute to knowledge and literature on stress coping strategies

among university students, and also, serve as a source of information for social workers, researchers, students, and academic counsellors in the various departments, as well as counsellors at the Counselling Unit of UEW.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress has been defined in different ways by different theorists but Weiten (2007) sees it as a complex concept which is explained as any circumstance that threatens or is perceived to threaten one's well-being and thereby tax one's coping abilities. The stress may be due to immediate physical safety, long range security, self-esteem, reputation, peace of mind or many other things that one values. According to Mundia (2010), stress is a non-specific physiological reaction to internal and external demands made on the body, but argues that not all stress is bad. This is buttressed by Student Support Services (2007), and Australian Counselling Association (2007) who maintain that an optimum amount of stress referred to as positive stress, is needed to keep a person challenged and energized.

According to Werner, Bates, Bell, Murdoch and Robinson (1992) few studies claim that people learn a few good lessons from some aspects of stress such as Critical Incident Stress (CIS). To Tassie and Whelan (2007), as indicated in Mundia (2010), the notion of Stress Related Growth (SRG) supports the view that individuals learn and grow from stressful events. Similarly, Feldman (2008) points out that stress is not necessarily a bad aspect of life since without stress people might not be adequately motivated to complete the activities they need to accomplish. These advantages of stress notwithstanding, Feldman (2008) makes it clear that too much stress can have an adverse effect on the physical and psychological health of a person. According to Benton, Robertson, Tseng, Newton, and Benton (2003) severe and profound kinds of stress can lead to death through suicide or stroke, and along with depression and anxiety, stress is rated one of the three common mental health problems that affect university students in the world (Mundia, 2010).

Numerous events can be stressful for one person or another, and to better understand the concept stress, theorists have analysed the nature of stressful events and divided them into acute stress, chronic stress and episodic stress (Weiten, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2004). Acute stress is the most common form of stress and it is a real or perceived stress as a result of a reaction to an immediate threat, anticipated demands, or pressures of the recent past or the near future. They are also the threatening events that have a relatively short duration and a clear endpoint. As a result of its short term, acute stress does not have enough time to do the extensive damage associated with long-term stress. However, it can pop up in anyone's life, but it can be treated and managed. Examples include rushing to meet deadlines for submission of assignments and projects, stressing over quizzes and examinations (Weiten, 2007; American Psychological Association, 2004). Chronic stress is a perpetual stress that wears on people continuously and often develops when the individual does not see a way out of a bad situation. Here, the individual has no hope of getting solutions to the stress. This type of stress is also a threatening event and has a relatively long duration. Examples include relationship problems, persistent financial challenges and family, and health worries. Episodic stress also refers to the stress that develops when the individual's way of life is based on continuous disorganization,

chaos, and crisis. Such people are overburdened with tasks or responsibilities and are unable to organize themselves, leading to constant worries. These people tend to always be in a rush, but are always late. They tend to be pessimistic, and this causes them to be anxious and sometimes depressed.

Several factors account for stress among people including university students. Citing Cohen, Kessler and Underwood-Gordon (1995), Mundia (2010) posits that majority of stress seem to be person-age-situation specific, stressing that people experience different stressors in different places such as the home context, school setting, and work environment, and in addition, children, adolescents, middle aged persons, and the old seem to have different stressors. Cohen, Kessler and Underwood-Gordon (1995) contend that the causes of stress could be classified under three broad categories namely environmental, biological and psychological. Pabiton (2004; 2007) comments that some environmental causes of stress are stress include adjusting to life in a new environment, loneliness or isolation, and cultural shock. Ovunga, Boardman, and Wasserman (2006) reveal that in developing countries, student mental health problems like stress are caused by a host of lifelong factors such as pressure of academic work, poverty, diseases, natural disasters, environmental hazards, war and the unrealistic expectations of parents and teachers (Mundia, 2010). Psychological factors that contribute to stress as conceived by Pabiton (2007) are revising for tests, sitting for examinations, meeting deadlines for coursework assessments, and repeated failure. Other psychological causes as outlined by Student Support Services (2007) include the pressure of combining paid work with study, procrastination, excessive workload as well as parents' and students' unrealistic expectations. Atindanbila (2006) points out that setting very high standards, lack of requisite skills and suppressing workers' assertiveness are some factors that trigger stress. Among the biological causes of stress as indicated by Burns (2003) are chronic sickness and poor health.

Through research, it has been found out that stress has three main components identified as cognitive, affective and behavioural, and that the physiology and mental health of an individual can be negatively affected by long-term stress (Bartlett, 1998). Many writers, including Burns (2003), Ogden (2000) and Australian Counselling Association (2007) intimate that stress has several symptoms on the individual with the most profound being burnout, headaches (migraines), hypertension, ulcers, insomnia, and sexual dysfunction. Atindanbila (2006) stresses that about 70% of absenteeism and about 90% of mistakes at the workplace are due to stress.

Feldman (2008) writes that contemporary health psychologists identify three main effects of stress. Firstly, stress has direct physiological effects and these include increased high blood pressure, increased hormonal activity, and an overall decline in the functioning of the immune system. Secondly, stress results in people engaging in behaviours that are harmful to their health. These include increased smoking, drug and alcohol use, poor eating habits, and decreased sleep. Thirdly, stress brings about indirect health-related behaviours such as decrease in likelihood of seeking medical advice, increase in delays in seeking medical advice, and decrease compliance with medical advice when it is sought. Weiten (2007) maintains that the three responses to stress are emotional (annoyance, anger, anxiety, fear, dejection, grief etc.), physiological (autonomic arousal, hormonal fluctuations, neurochemical changes etc.), and behavioural or coping efforts (lashing out at others, blaming oneself, seeking help, solving problems, and releasing emotions).

According to Ciccarelli and White (2009) physical symptoms include unusual fatigue, sleeping problems, frequent colds, chest pains and nausea. This brings about different behaviours such as pacing, eating too much, crying a lot, smoking and drinking more than usual, or physically striking out at others by hitting or throwing things. Emotionally, people experience anxiety, depression, fear, irritability, anger and frustration. Mental symptoms also include problems in concentration, memory, and decision making, and loss of sense of humour.

Anspaugh, Hamrick and Rosato (2003) opine that all events in life bring about a reaction, but there are varied ways through which people react or respond to them. Coping with stress as explained by Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) is the attempt to manage, control, reduce, deal, or learn to tolerate the threats that lead to stress. They posit also that people habitually use certain coping responses to deal with stress even though most of the time, they are not aware of these responses. Feldman (2008) supports this by intimating that individuals who experience stress may also not be aware of the minor stressors of life until they build up to become severe. In the view of Anspaugh, Hamrick and Rosato (2003) coping does not necessarily result in success. To them, successful coping includes becoming aware of incidents and situations that one perceives as being stressful, and recognizing stressors means being aware of how your body responds to stress. Dealing successfully with stress may require using different types of techniques. Folkman and Moskowitz (2004) purport that more direct, and potentially more positive ways of coping with stress could be put into two main categories, namely emotion-focused and problem-focused coping strategies. In emotion-focused coping, individuals try to manage their emotions during stress situations, and seek to change the way they feel about or perceive the problem. Examples of emotion-focused coping include seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, denial and mental disengagement. According to Feldman (2008), problem-focused coping on the other hand tries to modify the stressful problem or source of stress. This coping strategy leads to changes in behaviour or to the development of a plan of action to deal with stress. Among the examples of problem-focused coping are active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, restraint coping, and seeking social support for instrumental reasons.

A study by Amran, Hassan and Say [nd] revealed that emotion-focused style (overall mean of 3.47) of coping with stress was preferred by B. Ed (TESL) Foundation Cohort 3 students to problem-focused style (overall mean of 3.35). It was found out under the emotion-focused coping that positive reappraisal strategy was the most used while the least strategy used was escape-avoidance. The conclusion was that students managed stress by creating a positive meaning in terms of personal growth and feeling that the stress they were going through could change them in a good way. For the problem-focused style, the study showed that the strategy most used was accepting responsibility while the least used was confrontative coping, making them conclude that the students acknowledged their role in the problem when coping with stress. Under the emotion-focused style Amran, Hassan and Say [nd] found out that positive reappraisals strategy was the most used while the least strategy used was escape-avoidance. A similar study undertaken at the Winneba campus of UEW, Ghana, by Esia-Donkoh, Yelkperri and Esia-Donkoh (2011) showed that out of the ten strategies used, planning, and positive reinterpretation and growth were the two most predominant strategies for problem-focused and

emotion-focused coping styles respectively. Again, the emotion-focused style in coping with stress was preferred by the students to the problem-focused style.

Operational Definitions of Coping Strategies Used in the Study

Active Coping (AC): Taking steps to try to remove the stressor to improve its effects by initiating direct action, increasing one's efforts and trying to cope in a systematic way.

Planning (P): Thinking about how to cope with a stressor by drawing action strategies, thinking about what steps to take and how best to handle the problem.

Suppression of Competing Activities (SCA): Suppressing involves competing activities with the view to concentrating more fully on the challenge or threat at hand.

Restraint Coping (RC): Waiting until an appropriate opportunity to act presents itself, holding oneself back, and not acting prematurely.

Seeking Social Support for Instrumental Reasons (SSSIR): Seeking advice, assistance or information on the problem at hand.

Seeking Social Support for Emotional Reasons (SSSER): Getting moral support, sympathy or understanding of a problem at hand.

Positive Reinterpretation and Growth (PRG): Managing distress emotions rather than dealing with the stressor per se.

Acceptance (A): Accepting the reality of a stressful situation.

Denial (D): Refusal to believe that the stressor exists or trying to act as though the stressor is not real.

Mental Disengagement (MD): Using alternative activities such as games, exercises, watching movies and drinking alcohol to take one's mind off a problem.

METHODOLOGY

The descriptive survey research design was employed because it produces a good number of responses from numerous people at a time, provides a meaningful picture of events and seeks to explain people's perception and behaviour on the basis of information obtained at a point in time. It also describes the existing variables in a given situation and, sometimes, the relationship that exists among those variables, and could be used with greater confidence with regards to particular questions which are of special interest and value to researchers (Johnson and Christensen, 2012; Fraenkel and Wallen, 2009).

The target population was all sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana. However, all 2012/2013 final year sandwich students numbering 453, were purposively sampled for the study because they had spent two semesters and had got the experience of writing assignments, quizzes and end of semester examinations. Aside this, they may have experienced some stress in their day to day activities such as interpersonal relationships which serve as a source of stress. At the time of collecting the data, Level 300 and Diploma sandwich students in the Department had barely spent two months on their programme as at the time of the study, and as such might not have experienced a wide range of stress. Carver, Scheier and Weintraub's (1989) five-point Likert-scale type questionnaire used for a similar research, was adapted and used for the study. The adapted questionnaire was validated by some lecturers of UEW and University of Cape Coast (UCC), all in Ghana. Comments and observations made by

these lecturers were noted and used to improve the items in the questionnaire. The questionnaire was pre-tested using 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Early Childhood Care and Development, UEW, Ghana. These students share similar characteristics with their counterparts in the Department of Basic Education, especially in terms of location and duration used for academic work in a semester. An analysis of data obtained from a pre-test of the questionnaire recorded a reliability co-efficient of 0.8373 (standardized item alpha) which is mathematically written as $\alpha=0.8373$ and falls within the accepted range of 0.5000 and 1.000 (Johnson and Christensen, 2012). For the main study, the questionnaire was administered to all 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, after a lecture on Wednesday, July 10, 2013. Out of the 453 questionnaires distributed, 424 were returned, indicating a returning rate of 93.6%). However, 406 questionnaires which had been correctly filled by respondents were used for the analysis.

DATA ANALYSIS, FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

In coding the questionnaire and analysis of the responses obtained, the IBM Version 20 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) was used. Frequency and simple percentages were used in analyzing Research Question 1. In analyzing Research Questions 2 and 3, means and standard deviation were used.

Analysis of Research Question 1: Which type of stress is experienced more often by 2013/2014 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana? The data presented in Table 1 answers this question.

Table 1

Type of stress experienced most

Type of Stress	Sex		Total
	Male	Female	
Acute	116 (28.6%)	114 (28.0%)	230 (56.6%)
Chronic	74 (18.2%)	42 (10.4%)	116 (28.6%)
Episodic	40 (9.9%)	20 (4.9%)	60 (14.8%)
Total	230 (56.6%)	176 (43.4%)	406 (100.0%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

From the data in Table 1, it is realized that the total number of respondents for the study is 406, and this involves 230 (56.6%) males and 176 (43.4%) females. The data shows the type of stress experienced most by the 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana. It can be seen that 230 (56.6%) of the students, made up of 116 (28.6%) male and 114 (28.0%) females mostly experience acute stress. It is seen from Table 1 that the students who mostly experience chronic stress are 116 (28.6%) made up of 74 (18.2%) males and 42 (10.4%) females. The table also shows that out of the 60 (14.8%) final year sandwich students who mostly experience episodic stress, 40 (9.9%) are male while 20 (4.9%) are females.

It could therefore be inferred that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students at the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, mostly experience acute stress. This finding is not surprising because Weiten (2007) and American Psychological Association (2004) maintain that acute stress is seen as the most common form of stress which has a relatively short duration, and results from a reaction to a perceived immediate threat, anticipated demands, or pressures of the recent past or the near future. Since students are to meet deadlines in submitting assignments and projects, and prepare very well for quizzes and examinations, the likelihood of them experiencing acute stress is very great.

For the analysis of Research Questions 2 and 3, the criteria shown in Table 2 were used to show the regularity of use for each of the strategies. The mean of means scores were also obtained for the emotion-focused and problem-focused styles of coping. Based on the mean of means, the coping style predominantly used by 2012/2013 final year sandwich students at the Department of Basic Education, UEW was determined.

Table 2

Criteria for Regularity of Use for each Coping Strategy

Mean Rating Range	Usage/Interpretation
0.0 – 0.9	Never
1.0 – 1.9	Seldom
2.0 – 2.9	Sometimes
3.0 – 3.9	Often
4.0 – 5.0	Always

Analysis of Research Question 2: What strategies do 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana use in coping with the stress they experience on campus?

Data obtained in answering this research question is presented in Tables 3 and 4. It is shown from the data in Table 3 that restraint coping strategy had the highest mean of 4.07 with standard deviation of 0.96. Seeking social support for instrumental reasons strategy however recorded the lowest mean of 2.44 with a standard deviation of 1.18.

Table 3

Problem-focused Style Strategies in Coping with Stress

Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Restraint Coping (RC)	4.07	0.95	Always
Active Coping (AC)	3.72	1.00	Often
Planning (P)	3.71	0.93	Often
Suppression of Competing Activities (SCA)	3.70	1.03	Often
Seeking Social Support for Instrumental Reasons (SSSIR)	2.44	1.22	Sometimes
Mean of means = 3.53	Standard Deviation = 1.03	Source: Fieldwork, 2013	

In Esia-Donkoh, Yelkpleri and Esia-Donkoh's (2011) study, active coping strategy recorded the highest mean of 3.75 with a standard deviation of 0.96 while seeking social support for instrumental reasons strategy had the lowest mean of 2.52 with a standard deviation of 1.18. Inferring from the data presented in Table 3, the strategy mostly used by the 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, for problem-focused coping style is restraint coping, followed by active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities, and seeking social support for instrumental reasons, in that order. Furthermore, the results reveal that restraint coping is the strategy always used for problem-focused coping style while active coping, planning, suppression of competing activities are often used. Seeking social support for instrumental reasons is however sometimes used.

A study by Esia-Donkoh, Yelkpleri and Esia-Donkoh (2011) indicates that active coping and restraint coping were often used while planning, suppression of competing activities and seeking social support for instrumental reasons were sometimes used. The inference that could be made from the findings in Table 3 is that in coping with stress, 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana always try to avoid indulging in activities that are not directly related to their academic work and not planned. They always try to avoid taking hasty decisions that may compound their stressful situation and become realistic in undertaking their activities. They also mostly take some time off to cool down in the face of failure or disappointment.

A cursory look at the data in Table 4 shows that positive reinterpretation and growth strategy recorded the highest mean score of 4.15 with a standard deviation of 0.96 while mental disengagement obtained the lowest mean score of 2.60 with a standard deviation of 1.06. This means that under emotion-focused style of coping with stress, the strategy mostly adopted by 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana is positive reinterpretation and growth, followed by acceptance, denial, and seeking social support for emotional reasons in that order, while mental disengagement is the least strategy used.

Table 4

Means of Emotion-focused Style Strategies in Coping with Stress

Strategy	Mean	Standard Deviation	Interpretation
Positive Reinterpretation and Growth (PRG)	4.15	0.91	Always
Acceptance (A)	3.68	1.18	Often
Denial (D)	3.11	1.18	Often
Seeking Social Support for Emotional Reasons (SSSER)	2.80	1.15	Sometimes
Mental Disengagement (MD)	2.60	1.06	Sometimes
Mean of means = 3.27	Standard Deviation = 1.10	Source: Fieldwork, 2013	

A study conducted by Esia-Donkoh, Yelkperi and Esia-Donkoh (2011) also showed that positive reinterpretation and growth strategy (mean score of 3.88; standard deviation of 0.96) was mostly used by students at the Winneba campus of UEW, Ghana. This was however followed by mental disengagement (mean score of 3.69; standard deviation of 1.11), acceptance (mean score of 3.67; standard deviation of 1.06), and denial (mean score of 3.60; standard deviation of 0.78) in that order, while the least strategy used is seeking social support for emotional reasons (mean score of 2.61; standard deviation of 1.18).

Again, data in Table 4 indicates that positive reinterpretation and growth style is always used while acceptance and denial styles are often used. However, seeking social support for emotional reasons, and mental disengagement are sometimes used. The study by Esia-Donkoh, Yelkperi and Esia-Donkoh (2011) on the other hand showed that positive reinterpretation and growth style, mental disengagement, acceptance and denial were often used while seeking social support for emotional reasons was sometimes used. The data in Table 4 imply that students mostly manage their stress by looking for something good in the problem at hand, trying to set the stressful situation in a different light to make it seem more positive, drawing some lessons from the stressful experience and trying to grow as a person as a result of the experience. This supports the view of Low (1997) that students mostly solve their problems by creating a positive meaning in terms of personal growth. Instead of facing the stressful situation with a negative attitude, students feel that the problems they face could change them in a good way (Esia-Donkoh, Yelkperi and Esia-Donkoh, 2011).

Analysis of Research Question 3: To what extent are the coping strategies of 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, more problem-focused or emotion-focused?

The overall mean (mean of means) for problem-focused and emotion-focused styles of coping with stress is shown in Table 5. The data shows that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, use more problem-focused than emotion-focused styles in coping with stress. This is seen from a mean of means score of 3.53 with an overall standard deviation of 1.03 for problem-focused coping style, while a mean of means

score of 3.27 with an overall standard deviation of 1.10 was obtained for emotion-focused coping style. This finding however contradicts the findings from a similar study by Esia-Donkoh, Yelkperi and Esia-Donkoh (2011) who found out that full time students at the Winneba campus of UEW, Ghana predominantly used emotion-focused style (mean of means score of 3.49 and overall standard deviation of 1.02) in managing stress than problem-focused style (mean of means score of 3.00 and overall standard deviation of 1.07).

Table 5

Popular Coping Style

Coping Style	Means of Means Scores	Standard Deviation
Problem-focused	3.53	1.03
Emotion-focused	3.27	1.10

Source: Fieldwork, 2013

The implication from the findings in Table 5 is that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students at the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, in their bid to cope with stress in the academic environment try to deal with the cause (s) of the stressors by finding out information on the problem and learning new skills to manage the problem. That is, they try to change, modify, or eliminate the source of the stress by taking steps to isolate the causes of the stressful situation such as fatigue, and devising strategies to resolve the stressful situations one after the other. They may achieve this by creating a plan of action, making constructive changes to a situation, developing different solutions to the same problem, and trying to see things from other people's view point. They may also draw on past experiences, seek practical advice from others and acquire personal skills (time-management, assertiveness) that could be useful to them as students.

Penland, Masten, Zelhart, Fournet and Callahan (2000) found that participants who engaged in problem-focused coping experienced a greater decrease in depressive symptoms compared to participants who engaged in other coping styles. Crockett, Iturbide, Torres Stone, McGinley, Raffaelli and Carlo (2007) also found problem-focused coping to be the most adaptive coping style employed by university students. Their examination of the associations between problem-focused coping and stress, anxiety and depression in 148 Mexican American college students revealed that problem-focused coping was associated with reduced depressive symptoms.

A study by Bouteyre, Maurel and Bernaud (2007) further demonstrates the negative association between problem-focused coping and psychological distress in university students. They were interested in examining both the prevalence of depressive symptoms in French students and the role of coping styles in relation to depressive symptoms. Their study showed that 41% of the 233 students they measured exhibited depressive symptoms. However, participants that engaged in problem-focused coping were less likely to exhibit depressive symptoms. Another study by van Berkel (2009) using 201 students from the University of Canterbury sought to investigate the

relationship between personality, coping styles and stress, anxiety and depression. It was found out from the study that a correlation exists between problem-focused coping style and depressive symptoms. It is therefore refreshing that final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, mostly employ problem-focused strategy in managing stress since that is likely to lower their levels of stress, anxiety and depression compared to other coping styles.

CONCLUSION

The conclusion that could be made from the findings from the study is that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, mostly experience acute stress, followed by chronic stress and episodic stress. It could be concluded also that these students use both problem focused and emotion focused strategies in managing stress on campus. However, they prefer to use problem focused strategy (mean=3.5; standard deviation=1.03) more than emotion focused strategy (mean=3.27; standard deviation=1.10). They predominantly use restraint coping as a problem-focused strategy, and positive reinterpretation and growth as the most predominant strategy for emotion-focused coping style.

RECOMMENDATIONS

1. The findings from the study show that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, are more problem-focused (mean of means=3.53, overall standard deviation=1.03) in managing stress than being emotion-focused (mean of means=3.27, overall standard deviation=1.10). It is therefore recommended that the Counselling Centre of UEW should regularly organize seminars and workshops on Time Management and Techniques in Stress Management for sandwich students of the University. These seminars and workshops will go a long way to help the students identify the source of stress they experience in the academic environment and devise strategies to address the stressful situations they go through. Through such workshops and seminars, sandwich students will learn how to effectively plan their activities such as fixing or drawing time table for private studies, fixing time for library, group discussions, as well as time for other social and co-curricular activities.
2. It is also recommended that the Sports Directorate of the University puts in place measures that will regularly cater for the physical exercise and sporting needs of the sandwich students. This is because exercise has been shown to be a highly effective form of stress management since it provides an outlet for the fight or flight responses and has an advantage of removing the individual from the stress provoking situation.
3. Even though the findings of the study revealed that 2012/2013 final year sandwich students of the Department of Basic Education, UEW, Ghana, use more of problem-focused strategies in managing stress than emotion-focused strategies, it is recommended that the Counselling Centre of UEW puts in place improved services such as social support groups made up of lecturers and or academic counsellors, administrators and students. With this, supportive skills like talking about experiences and sharing ideas on

stress related issues could be developed. This will enable students to feel comfortable and free enough to express their feelings.

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