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A QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON THE EFFECTS OF STRESS ON STUDENTS' CLOTHING SELECTION AND DRESSING

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ABSTRACT: *This paper adopted the cross-sectional quantitative approach to examine the effects stressful activities have on clothing selection and dressing among students. A sample of 280 university students were reached by adopting the purposive and convenience sampling techniques. Thirty-seven (37) itemized questionnaire was used to obtain information from respondents. The descriptive analysis carried on three main variables presented high mean values of M=2.91, SD=0.14 for Stressful Activities, M=2.92, SD=0.21 for Clothing Selection Mode and M=2.68; SD=0.18 for Clothing Practices to Manage Stress. Results from hypotheses tested indicated positive correlation between stressful activities and clothing (β=0.406; S. E=0.187, p<0.05); stress management practices and clothing selection (β=0.615; S. E=0.065; p<0.05) as well as stressful activities and stress practices (β=-0.321; S. E=0.024; p<0.05). The study recommends that sensitization programmes should be organized for students to create awareness on possible sources of stressors and how to manage them through proper wardrobe planning and clothing management.*

KEYWORDS*:* academic activities, appearance, clothes, clothing selection, stress, stress management

INTRODUCTION

Academic work and its related stress is a common issue that has both positive and negative impact on learners. Bukhsh, Shahzad, & Nisa, 2011) described stress is an abnormality in behaviour that is linked to emotional disorders, reduced the performance of daily routine work or vitiated physical appearance in human. In today's world, the stresses of everyday life can raise cortisol levels and affect psychological functioning within the human body (Epel, 2018; Dickerson & Kemeny, 2004). Stress is deeply rooted on our daily activities (Kemp, 2017; Sapolsky, 2004) and Branson, (2019) perceived stress as an inevitable occurrence for all humans having both positive and negative impacts. There are indications that stressful life events contribute to dissatisfaction in body image and modifying appearance (Carrard, 2021; Kandiah, 2018; Jayanthi, 2018; Stitz & Pierce, 2013). Other possible effects may be attention deficit hyperactivity disorders (ADHD), substance abuse, antisocial behaviours and violence (Bihlar Muld, 2013). Extreme levels of stress can inhibit learning (Yikealo, 2018) and eventually induce emotional problems like fatigue, anxiety, fear,

depression or boredom among learners (Leonard, 2018; Swaner, 2007 cited Whitman, Spendlove, and Clark 1986). In an educational setting, stakeholders expectations from students dressing have often focused on dressing to conform to academic codes with emphasis on appearing decent and well groomed. Findings from Bukhsh et al. (2011) indicated that stress prevents university students from being focused thus preventing students from enjoying learning, behaving harmoniously and unfolding their unique talents. Academic pressure, a major stressor impedes students learning process Pascoe, at al., 2020 and Rai (2016) leading to reduced motivation to learning, cognitive dissonance and ultimately poor examination score. Studies have also shown a relation between ones appearance and conduct (Quittkat, 2019; Forster, 2014; Johnson & Lennon, 2014; Adam & Galinsky, 2012) which is a sign of good grooming. Although, good grooming practices is perceived to promote positive self-image and good behavior, this must reflect in one's code of conduct (Forster, 2014).

Making a decision to select what to wear and how to appear good seem to carry some stressful calculations and conditions. Early studies by Reilley & Rudd (2007) showed that women are more likely to disregard their appearance and make wrong food choices when coping with stress than men. Similar findings on stress and clothing management by Saiki et al. (2012) cited in Saiki et al. (2020) found a statistically significant decrease in the choice of accessories, official clothing, cosmetics, hair care, and use of body creams/perfumes from the responses of 542 women in their study that during stressful conditions. Although everybody is subjected to a level of stress, Ola (2019) stated that these stressful moments should not dictate what is worn. Ola added that the connection between people's emotions and way of dressing is integral to the way people behave and their identity, hence the need to be concern of what is worn. Additionally, putting on different clothes evokes different thoughts and mental processes, thus clothes can change mood and thoughts (Ola, 2019). Academic activities have been perceived to be stressful according to Reddy (2018) and if not managed well may mutilate personal, family, institutional and national development. When students feel stressed up, they may disregard selecting appropriate clothes, accessories and cosmetics or wrongfully combine what they select to wear thus affecting their general outlook. Eventually, stress induced by academic activities may intensify poor performance (Oduwaiye, 2017) and adverse psychosocial effects through a mechanism of inappropriate clothing selection and dressing. It is against the above background that informed the researcher to examine how stressful activities influence clothing selection and management. This phenomena has received little attention in the area of study as well as general research. Hence, a cursory examination of the effects of stressful activities on students' clothing selection and dressing was carried out with the view to help improve the psychosocial health and academic performance among students. The study specifically examines activities that contribute to stress among university students, clothing selection mode when students are under stress and how clothes and accessories influence stress management among students.

METHODS

A cross-sectional descriptive research design was employed for this study. This design has been widely used to make inferences and characterizing conditions that affect a population at a given

time (Hemed, 2015). The study population comprised all undergraduate students in the University of Education, Winneba and specifically targeted Home Economics students. A total number of 280 level 200 and 300 students for 2019/2020 academic year from the Faculty of Home Economics Education were purposively surveyed. Samples were conveniently reached by the researcher. The convenience sampling technique was considered for this study due to accessibility and willingness of the participants to participate in the study (Etikan et al. 2016). A self-developed questionnaire was used to solicit information from respondents. Items on the questionnaire covered both demographic characteristics of respondents as well as the effects of stressful activities on students' clothing selection and dressing which was in a Likert scale form. Descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviation) and normality analysis on three main constructs namely; stressful activities (10 items), clothing selection (11 items) and stress management practices (9 items) were analyzed, presented in tables and discussed.

RESULTS

Demographic Profile

Respondents' demographic characteristics were checked, analyzed and the summary is presented in Table 1.

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Respondents

Variable	*Variable Level*	*N=280*	*%*
Sex	Male	9	3.2
	Female	271	96.8
Age			
	Below 25	128	45.7
	25-29	56	20.0
	30-34	72	25.7
	35-39	23	8.2
	40-44	1	0.4
Marital Status			
	Single	244	87.1
	Married	35	12.5
	Separated	1	0.4
Course Level			
	200	208	74.3
	300	72	25.7
Religious Affiliation			
	Christianity	245	87.5
	Islam	35	12.5
Housing status on campus			
	Residence	185	66.1
	Non residence	95	33.9
Ethnic Group			
	Akan	138	49.3
	Ewe	74	26.4
	Dagomba	39	13.9
	Ga-Adangbe	23	8.2
	Others	6	2.1

Field Survey 2019

Table 1 shows the demographic profile of the respondents. From the Table, 3.2% (9) of the respondents were males and the remaining 96.8% (271) representing females. Out of the total of 280 respondents, 45.7% (128) were below 25 years, 20% (56) were within 25-29 years, 25.7% (72) were within 30-34 years, 8.2% (23) were within 35-39 years and 0.4%(1) within 40-44 years as shown in the table. The result shows the marital status of the respondents, 87.1% (244) were single, 12.5% (35) were married while 0.4% (1) has separated marriage. The analysis shows that 74.3% (208) were in second year of their course of study while 25.7% (72) of the respondents who form part of the study were in their third year of their respective course of study. As evidence in the table, 87.5% (245) of the respondents were Christians while the remaining 12.5% (35) were Muslims. The result reveals that 66.1% (185) of the participants in this study were residence while 33.9% (95) were non-residence students. Information regarding the ethnicity of the respondents were gathered and the result shows that majority of the participants were Akans as they formed 49.3% (138), Ewes formed 26.4% (74), Dagombas formed 13.9% (39), Ga-Adangbe formed 8.2% (23) as indicated in the Table 1.

Descriptive Statistics and Normality Analysis

A descriptive statistics and normality analysis on the items that reflect the research objectives were carried out and the results are presented in Table 2.

Table 2 Descriptive Statistics and Normality Diagnostics

	Item	*M*	*SD*	*Skewness*	*Kurtosis*	*Overall*
	Stressful Activities					
SA1	Outreach programs on campus.	2.44	0.92	0.30	-0.75	2.91(0.14)
SA2	When I am preparing to write exams.	3.24	0.91	-1.04	0.19	
SA3	When searching for something needed urgently.	3.10	0.95	-0.67	-0.66	
SA4	Club and social group meetings.	2.27	1.10	0.50	-0.84	
SA5	When working in groups to do assignments.	2.83	0.85	-0.33	-0.50	
SA6	Practical lessons in my field of study.	3.24	0.93	-1.17	0.47	
SA7	Schedule for lectures in a day.	2.98	0.87	-0.68	-0.08	
SA8	When I don't have enough money.	2.78	0.94	-0.37	-0.73	
SA9	When I don't have enough knowledge or skill on how to perform some tasks.	3.23	0.84	-1.04	0.61	
SA10	When I make mistake in a project work.	3.04	0.95	-0.82	-0.19	
	Clothing Selection Mode When Under Stress					
CSM1	I search through my things to select the best clothing items to wear.	2.19	1.07	0.41	-1.09	2.92/0.21
CSM2	I am able to match colours of dresses I select to wear.	2.26	1.14	0.35	-1.30	

CSM3	I am able to select dresses and accessories to match my dressing.	2.89	1.03	-0.54	-0.85	
CSM4	I carry basic items such as handkerchief, purse, hand bag, umbrella, etc.	3.01	0.97	-0.71	-0.49	
CSM5	I dress to suit my status as a student-teacher	3.19	0.83	-0.87	0.23	
CSN6	I look through the mirror to be sure of how well I am looking.	2.89	1.05	-0.60	-0.83	
CSM7	I apply deodorant and perfume to keep the body fresh.	3.12	0.93	-0.74	-0.46	
CSM8	I smear or apply pomade, powder and lip gloss.	3.01	0.91	-0.55	-0.59	
CSM9	I iron my clothes before I wear them.	3.20	0.82	-0.90	0.33	
CSM10	I clean my shoes, sandals and bags before I use them.	3.17	0.82	-0.71	-0.18	
CSM11	I comb and style my hair well.	3.22	0.97	-1.07	0.08	
	Practices Observed To Manage Stress					
PMS1	I dress decently to manage stressful conditions.	3.01	0.89	-0.66	-0.28	
PMS2	I apply cosmetics to prevent obvious stress on my face.	2.46	1.04	0.05	-1.15	2.68/0.18
PMS3	I have organized my clothes and accessories so that when under stress, I can reach them easily	3.19	0.79	-0.65	-0.24	
PMS4	I browse online for new fashion designs.	2.79	1.01	-0.46	-0.85	
PMS5	I read fashion magazines when I am stress up.	2.58	1.00	-0.11	-1.05	
PMS6	I attend fashion events to refresh my mind.	2.54	1.09	-0.08	-1.28	
PMS7	I discuss fashion events and dress styles with friends and family.	2.75	1.04	-0.40	-0.98	
PMS8	I seek counselling from fashion experts to appear good.	1.90	0.92	0.61	-0.71	
PMS9	I select my favorite clothing to wear.	2.95	0.86	-0.50	-0.39	

Note: values under the overall indicates overall mean and standard deviation respectively

Table 2 shows the descriptive statistics and normality analysis of the study items. In this study three main constructs were used namely; stressful activities (10 items), clothing selection (11 items) and stress management practices (9 items). The mean value of each measurement item for each group ranged from 2.27 to 3.24, 2.19 to 3.22, 1.90 to 3.19 and the standard deviation ranged from 0.84 to 1.10, 0.82 to 1.14 and 0.79 to 1.09 for stressful activities, clothing selection and stress management practices respectively. The overall skewness and kurtosis for each of the items were within – 2.00 to 2.00 indicating overall a normal distribution of data (Gravetter & Wallnau, 2012;

George & Mallery, 2010). The results revealed that the respondents scored high on stressful activities (M=2.91, SD=0.14), Clothing selection (M=2.92, SD=0.21) and stress management practices (M=2.68; SD=0.18) indicating quite high level of agreement to statements raised.

RESULTS FROM HYPOTHESES

Three hypotheses were tested in this study and the result is presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Summary of Formulated Hypotheses

				β	***S.E.***	***C.R.***	***P-value***	***Remarks***
H1	Clothing Selection	<---	Stressful Activities	0.406	0.187	2.823	0.005	Support
H2	Clothing Selection	<---	Stress Practices	0.615	0.065	4.101	0.000	Support
H3	Stressful Activities	<--->	Stress Practices	-0.321	0.024	-2.769	0.006	Support

*Note: β = standardized beta coefficients; S.E. = standard error; C.R. = critical ratio; *p< 0.05*

Table 3 shows the summary of hypotheses raised. Stress activities significantly influenced clothing selection positively (*β=0.406; S. E=0.187, p<0.05*). Hence the hypothesis one is supported. Stress management practices, positively and significantly had influence on clothing selection (*β=0.615; S. E=0.065; p<0.05*) indicating the hypothesis is supported. Also, there was statistically and significant relationship between stressful activities and stress practices but in inversely relationship (*β=-0.321; S. E=0.024; p<0.05*). Hence, the hypothesis is supported.

DISCUSSION

Several studies have reported strong association of stress and academic work among students (Bhargava & Trivedi, 2018; Phinney & Haas, 2003). This study has given insights to activities that pose stress on university students, how stressors from campus life influence students clothing selection and clothing practices that are adopted to manage stress. The results from this study confirmed that all the respondents experienced stress from personal to institutional activities. Bhargava and Trivedi further traced the sources of stress among the youth from academic tests, interpersonal relations, relationship problems, financial to career exploration thus leading to "psychological, physical, and behavioral problems". Allen et al. (2014) noted biological problems such as changes in hormone as possible effect of stress on the people hence, the need to take precautions to manage stress levels.

The current study presents a link between stressful activities born from the environment respondents find themselves and clothing selection practices during stressful moments thus, supported all the hypotheses raised. Stitz and Pierce (2015) found variations in stress level and outward appearance of an individual by linking appearance with general health status and observing dress sense habits. The processes that a person goes through mentally to take a decision on what to wear, treatments given to clothes and accessories before wearing and getting dressed up come naturally with stress. These perceived hidden stressors from selecting clothes and accessories and getting dressed coupled with underlying stress are likely to increase a person's

stress level. The person may eventually make the wrong choice or otherwise but in the end this will affect the person's mood and health status negatively or positively.

Similarly, the findings support Saiki, Kandiah and McCarthy (2012) whose study participants "dressed formally" when they are stressed up. In a similar study by Kandiah et al. (2018) majority of females' responses to items on dressing and eating habits when they are under perceived stress, 78.3% indicated they dress casually whilst 76.7% indicated they try to look better. In a paired sample t tests done on this same study observed significant decrease value of $p < .028$ on patterns of dressing indicating that participants selected few clothing items such as accessories and body enhancements when they are under stress. The effects of these stressful experiences may not be sudden but will gradually affect the individual's health and general appearance.

IMPLICATIONS OF THE STUDY

This survey highlights key areas which have been under-researched whilst contributing to relatively new concepts on stress and clothing usage. Empirical findings from this survey have demonstrated the effect of stress on clothing choices and appearance vis -a- vis ways to manage stress with the adoption of clothing usage. The assumption here is that if stressful activities are minimized, students are likely to appear well thus, building confidence in learning and performing well. On the contrary, so much stressful activities are likely to increase stress levels thus, affecting students' appearance in terms of dressing. Similarly, findings from this study present potential use of clothing to minimizing stress related issues implying that conscious efforts in clothing selection, can contribute to effective stress management and eventually contribute to positive performances and outcomes. Stressors have the potential to influence one's health status and general well-being as literature seem to suggest. Therefore, recommendations from this study could be adopted to manage stress among students.

CONCLUSIONS

The study generally agrees with the Biopsychosocial Model propounded by George Engel (1977) that explains the association between three factors that influence a person's health: biological, psychology and socio-environment. Linking the model to the current study, the researcher perceives stress as a health condition which is influenced by a person's physiological make up (biological), personality (psychological) and social environment (socio-environment). This may imply that in fulfilling a person's demands begin with decision making which engineer the experiencing of stress. Hence, one needs to be intrinsically and extrinsically well groomed to reduce stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study recommends that:

1. A comprehensive stressor analysis need to be carried out in the university to identify main sources of stress among university students and also to find out whether clothes and accessories choices students make can help reduce stress or not.
2. Appropriate and effective intervention programmes to address, discuss and create awareness possible stressors on students' life on campus and how to manage stress through the adoption of clothing practices is required. Institutions are encouraged to regularly sensitize members to be conscious and observe practices that will help minimize their stress levels.
3. Academic counselling activities on campus should include dress sense and good grooming activities since studies on clothing psychology seem to suggest a positive link between stress and appearing good.

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