



Relationship between academic stress and coping strategies among students of Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria

HASSAN I. Imam¹, JIMOH, Buhari Edun² and IDRIS, Yakubu Idris³

¹Department of Criminology and Security Studies, Faculty of Social Science,

Federal University Lafia, Nigeria

²Department of Sociology, Faculty of Social Sciences,

Federal University of Lafia, Nigeria.

Corresponding Email: jimohbuhariedun@gmail.com

Abstract

Globally, students experience varying levels of pervasive and persistent stress predominantly related to their academics, which can have a significant impact on their lives and even their academic output. This study examined the relationship between academic stress and coping strategies of students in Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State. The descriptive cross-sectional survey design was employed. Using the stratified and simple random sampling methods, 200 regular male and female undergraduate students were engaged to participate in the study. The study was guided by two research questions and two hypotheses. Both the questionnaire and in-depth interview are the instruments for data collection while the Pearson 'r' product moment correlation analysis was used to test the hypothesis. It was found that undergraduate students, in one way or the other, go through some kind of academic stress during the course of their study. It was also discovered that students' academic stress is significantly correlated with their poor academic performance in Federal University of Lafia, Nasarawa State. Based on the findings of the study, the study recommends that the University management should provide more avenues or opportunities for students to engage in extracurricular activities.

Keywords: Academic stress, coping strategies, students

1. Introduction

Stress is an inevitable part of existence that generally affects people all over the world regardless of their social, economic, or demographic status. The World Health Organization (2016) dubbed stress as "health epidemic" of the 21st century. More often than not, the very mention of the word brings up thoughts like increased rate of anxiety, depression, heart related diseases and other uncomfortable issues and emotions to one's mind. In the same context, Nordqvist (2017) describe stress as unpleasant emotion that people feel when their lives become excessively demanding and which endanger their health. This is especially true when the demands place a strain on the personal and social resources that people can mobilize. As a result, what

is stressful for one person might not be for another. People react to stress in different ways. Consequently, the type of stress and its intensity depend greatly on the personality of the person and how they handle it. Rudland, Golding and Tim (2019) argued that stress is not always bad and harmful to people. That is, stress may act as a positive stimulus in peoples' lives when it stimulates the accomplishment of tasks. However, stress has been found to be beneficial only when short-lived, excessive amount of stress can lead to heart and mental health related illnesses (Mental Health Foundation, 2023). The Mental Health Statistics (2020) reported that 74% of people cannot cope due to the overwhelming feeling of stress.



Globally, students are often exposed to a variety of stressing experiences in the academia (Vally, Cody, Alsheraifi, & Albloshi, 2018). Getting into the university or college is a thrilling experience to many because this exposes them to new learnings and new paths that may lead to opportunities for growth. However, growing entails facing difficult situations and dealing with numerous responsibilities, and these have the potential of inducing in an individual the sense of both fulfilment and stress. Although in most tertiary institutions, students enjoy themselves with good friends and experiences, many still feel pressure in their academics. Stress is an inevitable social reality among university students. These stresses are multifactorial, resulting from both academic and non-academic factors (Bedewy & Gabriel, 2015). However, for most students, these stressors are predominantly related to their academics, and which have manifested several impediments against students who, now more than ever, have reported to being overly stressed out. As reported by the New York University Publication (2016), about 55% of university students have attributed their major stressor to be academic in nature.

In Nigeria, the phenomenon of academic stress is extremely proliferating among university students. Chibuzo (2017) stated that many students are exposed to stress as a result of financial conditions. These may include the struggle to acquire enough funds to cover tuition and the cost of living in the university, which may lead to students taking up side jobs to meet some necessities. About 36% of Nigerian students are said to be involved in either part time or full-time jobs (Chibuzo, 2017). The consequence of this may include a great amount of stress as these students attempt to manage their different roles. Even students who qualify for the needed financial aid for their college costs have to face paying back a large sum of money subsequent to graduation. Academic stress is a pervasive

and persistent experience in the lives of students of all ages and academic levels across the world. The combination of stressors that students are exposed to may cause a variety of anxiety disorders as well as general academic challenges and ineffectiveness in their lives. This academic stress can stem from various factors, including heavy workloads, academic difficulty, time constraints, and the pressure to excel (Zamronia, Nur, Ramilic, & Hambalid, 2019). The detrimental effects of academic stress have been observed amongst students (Lin & Huang, 2014; Mason, 2017; Kwaah & Essilfie, 2017). It is assumed that the seemingly stressful situations many Nigerian students encounter, particularly those associated with university campuses, lecture schedules, course outlines, overcrowded curriculum, unfavourable environmental conditions such as heat, student overcrowding, and inadequate lecture spaces will put students at risk of anxiety, depression, high blood pressure and other related illnesses.

It is therefore essential to understand students' academic stress experience and coping strategies, so that effective programmes can be developed and provided. However, at this time, no research has been identified that examines the academic stress and coping strategies among Federal University of Lafia (FU Lafia) students. Thus, it is against this premise that this study seeks to uncover the experiences of students in Federal University of Lafia relating to academic stress, sources of stress and the impact of stress on their daily life and their coping strategies. In order to assess the academic stress and coping strategies among students, this study seeks to achieve the following specific objectives to detect the sources of academic stress among students in Federal University of Lafia and to find out how students cope with academic stress in Federal University of Lafia. In addition, the



following null hypotheses are formulated to guide this study:

H₀: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and health of students in Federal University of Lafia.

H₀: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and academic performance of students in Federal University of Lafia.

2. Literature Review

Concept of Coping Strategies

In their study, Alharbi and Smith (2018), revealed that coping strategies can be seen of as a person's way of dealing with stressful situations in both their inner and outer environments. Mason (2017) defined coping as a "cognitive and behavioral" strategy used to manage or exert control over portions that are beyond one's own capabilities. Coping skills are necessary for protecting the psychological and physical effect of stress. Coping strategies, according to Bhukar et al. (2015), constitute stabilizing factors that may assist people experiencing stressful situations to be able to cope or manage them. Individuals therefore use coping mechanisms or strategies to help guide against feelings of anxiety and helplessness. But sometimes, individuals' coping strategy can become distorted and hence be rendered ineffective and no longer able to assist in dealing with stressors.

Additionally, in a research conducted by Hirsch, Barlem, Barlem, Lunardi, and Oliveira (2015) described coping strategy as an individual's capacity to adapt to various conditions, and to respond to thoughts, feelings, and behaviors caused by a diversity of events or situations. Coping strategies are were said to possess two main functions: firstly, it is to help in dealing with plights devote to an individual's stress, and secondly, to help regulate the various emotions related to stress. Moreover, Essel and Owusu (2017) and Learning (2018) identified the following as sources of academic stress for students in the

universities: increased workload, low grade and hours of study spent.

Effects of Academic Stress on Academic Performance of Students

A plethora of empirical research has been conducted that has explored the effects of stress on the academic performance of undergraduate or college students (Siraj et al., 2014; Chan et al., 2018; Dada et al., 2019). The World Health Organization (2016) reported, from a study conducted in the United States, that about 48% of the students studied experienced stress in school. However, in a similar research conducted by the American College Health Association (ACHA) which was reported by Frazier, Gabriel, Merians, and Lust (2018), 34% of undergraduate students reported that stress negatively affected their academic performance, while 37% of students reported that stress did not affect their performance.

Academic stress has been found to negatively impacts students' academic performance (Essel & Owusu, 2017). It reduces students' initiative to solve academic problems, and causes confusion in their thinking, particularly when study schedules seem difficult. Although limited and controlled stress has its advantages and can result in top performance, however, when left unmanaged, stress can result in fatigue, confusion, and a number of other vices. Students are often exposed to academic stress during exams period, which is to serve as a gauge of their capacity for adjustment and coping in stressful situations. Similarly, Samson-Akpan, John, Edet, and Uka (2017) maintained that students that experience academic stress do poorly in class because they are unable to focus. Long-term stress can even have an impact on their future because it can create a confusing and unpredictable environment for them. Most student could very quickly forget what they have been taught or what they have read and studied when under stress. Therefore, the resultant consequence is poor or low academic performance.



Theoretical Framework

A theory is defined as “a statement of concepts and their relationships that shows how and/or why a phenomenon occurs (Corley & Gioia, 2011). Theories are formulated to explain, predict, and, in many cases, to challenge existing knowledge within the limits of critical bounding assumptions. The theoretical approach to the present study will be based on already established theories of stress and coping strategies like the Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and the Theory of General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) by Selye (1973).

Transactional Theory of Stress and Coping

The stress and coping theory were developed by Richard Lazarus and Susan Folkman in 1984. The theory has served as the foundation for decades of coping research in several different samples experiencing a vast variety of types of stress. The transactional theory of stress and coping is a framework for evaluating the processes of coping with stressful events. The basic thesis of the transactional theory is that stress is a process that involves continuous interactions and adjustments known as “transactions” between an individual and the environment. Stress results from an imbalance between demand and resources. Thus, we become stressed when demands (pressure) exceeds our resources (our ability to cope). The theory places more emphasis in the interpretation of the stressful event rather than the event itself.

Richard Lazarus (1984) the originator of stress appraisal theory, believed that cognitive appraisal is key to understanding stress. Cognitive means thinking; appraisal means making a judgement of evaluating a potential stressor. The individual interacts with their environment, perceives it in a certain way and give meaning to it. Stress arises from an individual’s perception, when the demands of the environment place

a strain on them greater than their resources (e.g. time, money, level of support from family, friends (Obbarius, 2021). Stress occurs when a person feels they will have difficulties coping or cannot cope. This means that a stressor is not simply out there in the environment – it only becomes a stressor when people define it as such, and feel that it will strain or overcome their resources for dealing with it (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are two levels of appraisal of a potential stressor: primary and secondary.

Primary Appraisal: the first level of the appraisal – here the individual will decide whether an event is positive, neutral or negative. If they decide that the event is negative, the next step is to appraise the situation in terms of possible harm, threat or challenge. Whereas in the Secondary Appraisal, there is an evaluation of coping abilities and resources for dealing with the situation stress. How the individual deals with the stress will depend on both the primary and secondary appraisals. If harm and threat are seen as high and the coping abilities and resources perceived as low, then a high level of stress is probable.

It is important to note that a person’s social and cultural background and previous experience of similar situation can also influence the appraisal process (Dillard, 2019). In other words, individual differences do matter in how we perceive potential stressors. Different people perceive different events as stressors and respond to them in different ways.

In universities around the world, particularly in Nigeria, students are most often exposed to different varieties of stressing situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In most instances, academic stress is usually the reoccurring type of stress experienced by students. These could range from academic workloads and activities, interpersonal relationships, adjustment to the university environment, among others. In such situations, these students are forced to develop coping strategies in order to



manage or address these stressors. Just as how potential stressors could be appraised negatively or positively, coping strategies employed by students could also be positive or negative. This theory is particularly important or applicable to the area of coping with academic stress. By understanding how stress is appraised, one obtains information about the best methods for coping with stress. Understanding how stress occurs and the ways in which one deals with it is important so that one can become more effective at reducing the adverse effects of negative stress and the ability to maximize positive stress.

The transactional theory of stress and coping is a more cognitive approach as opposed to the theory of General Adaptation Syndrome which looks at the physiological processes involved in responding to a stressor. Another advantage of this theory is that, it is dynamic. That is, it acknowledges that individuals can change, reappraise a stressor and thus manage coping options. The theory also takes into consideration individual differences. It acknowledges that two individuals experiencing the same stress or stressful situation might differ in their ways of appraising that stressful situation. In other words, the manner in which we appraise and cope with stressors varies enormously, hence the adoption of this theory.

The theory however, is not without weaknesses. One criticism is that the theory overemphasizes the role of cognition in stress and does not adequately consider the role of emotion. Another limitation is that it is difficult to test through experimental research due to the subjective nature, variability and complexities of individual responses to stressful experiences.

3. Methodology

The study adopts a cross sectional survey research design. This allowed for the collection of data from a sample or the entire population at a single point in time,

finding a snapshot of the attitudes, opinions, behavior or characteristic of the population. The study was carried out in Federal University of Lafia. The University is located in Lafia town, Nasarawa state, North-Central, Nigeria. According to Leading and Ormrod (2010), revealed that population can be seen as the target group which the researcher is interested in gaining information and drawing conclusions. The target population for this were male and female students of Federal University of Lafia. This population is particularly relevant due to the high academic demands and pressure they are experience during their academic journey. The University has Nine (9) Faculty with 13, 775 students' population (Fulafia Academic Affair, 2024). Taro Yamane formular were used to determined sample size for the study. The sample size for the study is 221 respondents, multistage sampling method was employed for the study, the rationale behind this is to ensure that the sample represent the diversity of the student population. Three faculty were randomly selected to represent the population of study. These faculty are Faculty of sciences, Faculty of education and Faculty of social sciences. Secondly, the fishbowl sample technique was used to select three (3) departments from each of the faculties above.

Both questionnaire and In-depth interview were used as instrument for data collection. The questionnaires were measured on 5-point scale ranging from 5 (strongly agree) to 1 (strongly disagree) the choice of the questionnaire was because of its ability to cover a large geographical area and it is capable of concealing the identity while In-depth interview of five (2) questions on academic stress and coping strategies of students were conducted with the selected students of Federal University of Lafia. The study used descriptive statistic for data analysis. Lastly, the aspect of confidentiality was well stressed in order to encourage participants to give out the



necessary information that would answer the research questions.

4. Results and Discussion

Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents

The study participants comprised 137 (68.5%) males and 63 (31.5%) females. The majority belongs to ages 21-25 with 46.3% responses, and the least was 30-above age brackets with 2.0%. Categorization based on Faculty of study shows that the majority (41.5%) are from the Sciences, while 40.0%

are from Social Sciences, and 36.0% of the respondents represented Education. Furthermore, departmental statistics from the study shows that Sociology had the most participants (18.0%), followed by Microbiology (16.0%); whereas Special education had the least number of participants (3.0%). Finally, distribution based on the level of study, 26.0% of the participants were 100 level, 14.5% were in 200 level, the majority with 34.0% were in 300 level, and 25.5% were in 400 level.

Table 1: Distribution showing demographic data of Respondents

Characteristics	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Sex		
Male	137	68.5
Female	63	31.5
Total	200	100
Age		
16 – 20	72	36.3
21 – 25	93	46.3
26 – 30	27	13.4
31 – 35	06	3.0
36 – >	02	1.0
Total	200	100
Faculty		
Sciences	83	41.5
Social Sciences	81	40.5
Education	36	18.0
Total	200	100
Department		
Microbiology	32	16.0
Biochemistry	30	15.0
Chemistry	21	10.5
Political Science	31	15.5
Sociology	36	18.0
Social Work	14	7.0
Business Education	09	4.5
Library and Information Science	21	10.5
Special Education	06	3.0
Total	200	100
Levels of Study		
100 level	52	26.0
200 level	29	14.5
300 level	68	34.0
400 level	51	25.5
Total	200	100

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.



Sources of Academic Stress among students of Federal University of Lafia

The different sources of academic stress among students were assessed in the first specific objective of the study, questions pertaining to this aspect of the study were

designed on a 5-point Likert scale and respondents were asked to select the options that aligned best with their experiences. Table 2 below shows the summary of the data from the fieldwork:

Table 2: Ratings of the sources of academic stress among student of FULafia

Sources of Academic Stress	%Rating					Total
	S.A.	A.	U.D.	D.	S.D.	
Too much courses	83(41.5%)	57(28.5%)	26(13.0%)	28(14.0%)	6(3.0%)	200(100%)
Too much C.As	33(16.5%)	46(23.0%)	37(18.5%)	58(29.0%)	26(13.0%)	200(100%)
Difficulty of study materials	43(21.5%)	54(27.0%)	47(23.5%)	42(21.0%)	14(7.0%)	200(100%)
Speaking in class	31(15.5%)	36(18.0%)	47(23.5%)	64(32.0%)	22(11.0%)	200(100%)
Preparation for tests and exams	54(27.0%)	77(38.5%)	26(13.0%)	26(13.0%)	28(14.0%)	200(100%)
Attitude of lecturers	38(19.0%)	37(18.5%)	47(23.5%)	58(29.0%)	20(10.0%)	200(100%)
Transportation costs	95(47.5%)	38(19.0%)	26(13.0%)	28(14.0%)	13(6.5%)	200(100%)
Unfavourable lecture schedules	65(32.5%)	68(34.0%)	29(14.5%)	25(12.5%)	13(6.5%)	200(100%)
Boring lectures	63(31.5%)	64(32.0%)	28(14.5%)	27(13.5%)	18(9.0%)	200(100%)
Unstable electricity supply	59(29.5%)	40(20.0%)	33(16.0%)	34(17.0%)	34(17.0%)	200(100%)
High academic expectations	55(27.5%)	37(18.5%)	38(19.0%)	47(23.5%)	23(11.5%)	200(100%)
My personal inadequacy	29(14.0%)	29(14.5%)	42(21.0%)	51(25.5%)	49(24.5%)	200(100%)
Overcrowded lecture halls	102(51.0%)	45(22.5%)	14(7.0%)	26(13.0%)	13(6.5%)	200(100%)
Academic competition	38(19.0%)	36(18.0%)	49(24.5%)	38(19.0%)	39(19.5%)	200(100%)
Project work	59(29.5%)	33(16.5%)	62(31.0%)	26(13.0%)	20(10.0%)	200(100%)
Seeking for scholarship	28(14.0%)	39(19.5%)	71(35.5%)	36(18.0%)	26(13.0%)	200(100%)
Thinking about post-university	50(25.0%)	52(26.0%)	39(19.5%)	39(19.5%)	20(10.0%)	200(100%)
Relationship with girl/boy	14(7.0%)	21(10.5%)	51(25.5%)	55(27.5%)	59(29.5%)	200(100%)
I do not speak good English	13(6.5%)	22(11.0%)	27(13.5%)	47(23.5%)	91(45.5%)	200(100%)
Low grades	39(19.5%)	43(21.5%)	29(14.5%)	34(17.0%)	54(27.5%)	200(100%)
Procrastinating tasks	42(21.0%)	61(30.5%)	39(19.5%)	33(16.5%)	25(12.5%)	200(100%)
Not enough pocket money	102(51.5%)	43(21.5%)	20(10.0%)	15(7.5%)	19(9.5%)	200(100%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

NB: For the purpose of interpretation, Strongly Agree and Agree will be merged and expressed as “Agree”, while Disagree and Strongly Disagree will be merged and expressed as “Disagree”.

From the table above, Majority (70.0%) respondents agreed that too much courses result in academic stress for them. 42.0% of participants held a disagreeing opinion regarding “too much continuous assessment” as a factor contributing to their academic stress while 39.5% agreed to that view. Preparation for tests and exams was rated as a source of academic stress for student by (65.5%) respondents, whereas the feeling of personal inadequacy by students was not a source of academic stress for 50.0% of respondents. Furthermore, transportation costs is agreed by (66.5%) participants as being a source of academic

stress. Majority of respondents (73.5% and 51.0%) agreed that overcrowded lecture halls and thinking about post-university career contribute to their academic stress in the university. However, 57.0% of respondents disagreed that relationship with girlfriend or boyfriend is a source of academic stress. 69.0% and 44.5% of respondents disagreed with the statements “I do not speak good English” and “Low grades” as sources of academic stress. Meanwhile, 73.0% of respondents affirmed that not having enough pocket money is an academic stressor.



Findings from the above quantitative data was further buttressed by qualitative data from the in-depth interview. Expressing their opinions, one interviewee advanced that:

“...the sources of my academic stress are bulky outlines, lecturers not coming to class and actually having limited time to cover up those course outlines”. (Female, 300L, Biochemistry).

This respondent believes that very many course outlines given by lecturers to cover and of course the very limited timeframe with which they use to cover those courses outlines are a great source of academic stress. Another factor addressed by the respondent is the inability of lecturers to come to class. In the same context, another interviewee posited that:

“Firstly, I will say choked lectures. Like having lectures in the morning and still have in the afternoon and evening. Then continuously weekly like that, it’s really stressful for us which we experience more especially this second semester, it really affects us” (Male, 200L, Sociology).

For this interviewee, every week, the too many and compounded lecture schedules is a source of academic stress for students, especially this second semester. In additional, an interviewee exposed that:

“...maybe because your parents cannot support you in house or your loved ones could not support you in terms of finance, it can result to stress...you will not have money for transport you will start trekking every day to school. It can result to academic stress. And then maybe you are not certain about your future as a student you don’t know how your future will be...also time management, when you don’t manage your time, it can also be as a source of academic stress for students” (Male, 400L, Social Work).

For this respondent, lack of social support from family and loved ones, financial insufficiency for transportation in school, uncertainty about one’s future post-university and poor time management were sources of academic stress among students in the university.

Coping Strategies of Students in Federal University of Lafia

The different coping strategies employed by students of FU Lafia to manage academic stress was recorded in this section. Using a 5-point Likert scale, respondents were asked to select the options that aligned best with their experiences. The table (4.1.3.) below shows the summary of the data from the fieldwork:

Table 3: Ratings showing the various coping strategies used by FU Lafia students

Coping Strategies	%Rating				
	YES	NO	Mean	Std. D	Total
I seek for professional counselling	104(52.0%)	96(48.0%)	1.48	.50	200(100%)
I seek for social support from friends or family	151(75.5%)	49(24.5%)	1.25	.43	200(100%)



Coping Strategies	%Rating				
	YES	NO	Mean	Std. D	Total
I tried to relief my stress by taking alcoholic drinks	27(13.5%)	173(87.5%)	1.86	.34	200(100%)
I try to make myself feel better by smoking or drugs	13(6.5%)	187(93.5%)	1.93	.25	200(100%)
I pay money to get my homework or project done for me	22(11.0%)	178(89.0%)	1.89	.31	200(100%)
I use social media frequently	132(66.0%)	68(34.0%)	1.34	.47	200(100%)
I sleep a lot	83(41.5%)	117(58.5%)	1.58	.49	200(100%)
I watch lots of movies/listen to music	127(63.5%)	73(36.5%)	1.36	.46	200(100%)
I engage in sexual activities	19(9.5%)	181(90.5%)	1.90	.29	200(100%)
I get someone to tutor me	138(69.0%)	62(31.0%)	1.31	.46	200(100%)
I break my workload into bits and tackle each at a time	167(83.5%)	33(16.5%)	1.17	.37	200(100%)
I use candle, lamps, to study when there is no electricity	143(71.5%)	57(28.5)	1.28	.45	200(100%)
I study through the night to meet up	164(82.0%)	36(18.0%)	1.18	.38	200(100%)
I browse other resources from google, youtube, etc	179(89.5%)	21(10.5%)	1.11	.31	200(100%)
I use artificial intelligence (AI) to assist me in studying	148(74.0%)	52(26.0%)	1.26	.44	200(100%)
I use money to get my way with lecturers	16(8.0%)	184(92.0%)	1.92	.27	200(100%)
I cheat during assessment	25(12.5%)	175(87.5%)	1.88	.33	200(100%)
I skip studying when it gets too complicated	77(38.5%)	123(61.5%)	1.62	.49	200(100%)
I tell myself that school is scam and it isn't worth...	29(14.5%)	171(85.5%)	1.86	.35	200(100%)
I do part-time jobs to meet up with financial necessities	88(44.0%)	112(56.0%)	1.56	.50	200(100%)
I see everything as fate	134(67.0%)	66(33.0%)	1.33	.47	200(100%)
I leave things in the hands of God	177(88.5%)	23(11.5%)	1.11	.32	200(100%)

Source: Fieldwork, 2023.

From the distribution above, 52.0% of respondents affirmed to seeking out professional counseling as a way of coping with academic stress. Majority of respondents (75.5%) sought out social support from friends or families, while 87.5% and 93.5% answered that they do not try to make themselves better by taking alcoholic drinks and smoking or taking drugs respectively. Frequent use of social media is a popular way of managing academic stress among respondents 138

(69.0%). More respondents (83.5%) break their workloads into bits and tackle each at a time than 16.5% who do not, in order to manage their academic stress. Respondents do not sleep a lot or engage in sexual activities as indicated by 58.5% and 90.5% of responses respectively to cope with academic stress. Respondents (82.0%) rated studying through the night as a coping strategy, whereas using money to get way with lecturers was not a coping strategy among majority of respondents (92.0%). It



is popularly among respondents (88.5%) that leaving things in the hands of God is a coping strategy to manage academic stress. The quantitative data presented above was supported by qualitative data. From the in-depth interview session, one interviewee reported that:

“I cope with academic stress in the sense of planning, like I plan most especially I make my timetable for the time that is conducive for me to go back to what I have jotted in class or to read my hand-out. So, planning helps me a lot but at the same time it cannot cover all” (Female, 200L, Sociology).

For above interviewee, proper and effective planning of one’s schedules and task is one major way of coping with academic stress.

“...we need to look out for the causes of academic stress and solves it....by seeking for support where we are supposed to have support from. And also, how we manage our time,

we manage our time in preparing for activities for the semester, how we don’t our assignments, how we start preparing our study can also reduce academic stress. We also need do exercise, engaging with friends in leisure time can also manage academic stress on students” (Male, 400L, Social Work).

This interviewee presented that we need to understand the sources of academic stress to be able to effectively cope or manage it. He recommended seeking for support at appropriate contexts, proper preparation for academic activities including studying and assignments, as well as doing exercise and having leisure time with friends.

Test of Hypothesis

The Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient (r) analysis was used to test the hypotheses. The results from the analysis and testing are presented below:

Hypothesis 1: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and health of students in Federal University of Lafia.

Table 4: Correlation between academic stress and health of students in FU Lafia (N=200)

Variables	Mean	SD	DF	r-calculated	r-critical	P	Decision
Academic Stress	3.30	0.54	198	0.408	0.169	<0.001	Reject H0 ₁
Health	2.76	0.71					

**** Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)**

The result of the test in the table revealed that the correlation coefficient (r) of 0.408 is positive, indicating a direct relationship between students’ academic stress and their health outcomes. In other words, academic stress is associated with poorer health outcomes. For the strength of relationship, the absolute value of r (0.408) is considered a moderate positive correlation. Furthermore, testing the relationship at 0.07 level of significance with 198 degree of freedom, the critical r value is approximately 0.169. Hence, since the

calculated r (0.408) is greater than the critical value (0.169), we hereby reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, concluding that the relationship between students’ academic stress and health is statistically significant.

Hypothesis 2: There is no significant relationship between academic stress and academic performance among students in Federal University of Lafia.



Correlation between academic stress and academic performance among students of FU Lafia (N=200)

Variables	Mean	SD	DF	r-calculated	r-critical	P	Decision
Academic Stress	3.30	0.54	198	0.240	0.169	<0.001	Reject H0 ₂
Academic Performance	3.12	1.03					

** . Correlation is significant at 0.01 level (2-tailed)

The result of the Pearson r coefficient of 0.240 indicates a weak positive correlation between academic stress and academic performance of students. This means that as academic stress increases, there is a slight tendency for academic performance of students to increase as well. Furthermore, the p-value is less than 0.001 which is lower than the significance level of 0.07. This suggests that the observed correlation is statistically significant. Hence, we hereby reject the null hypothesis and accept the alternate hypothesis, concluding that the relationship between students' academic and health is statistically significant.

Discussion of Findings

Findings from the study are discussed in this section in order to highlight the areas of agreements and disagreements with the findings of authors reviewed in the literature. The discussions are presented thematically in line with the study specific objectives, thus:

Sources of Academic Stress among Students of FU Lafia

The first objective of the study attempted to uncover the various factors that contribute to academic stress of FU Lafia students. Result from the fieldwork revealed that too many courses, preparation for tests and examinations, transportation costs, unfavorable lecture schedules, boring lectures, unstable electricity supply and overcrowded lecture halls were common sources of academic stress for the greater number of respondents. Additionally, the study revealed that project work, thinking about post-university career, having low grades or carrying over a course, procrastinating tasks, and not having enough pocket money were also sources of academic stress for majority of respondents.

The lends support to Mason (2017) who attributed academic stressors among students to high number of assessments, lack of resources, academic competition, poor association and collaboration between and among students and lecturers, and time management. Similarly, the study findings also align with the results of Guzhaina et al., (2018) who reported that students' academic stress was conditioned by excessive curriculum overload, increased number of assessment due in short amount of time, exam preparation, peer competition, low grades, and disappointment. The study results furthermore corroborate with findings from Adeleke et al., (2022) who examined the stress level of students in Osun state, and highlighted such issues like financial difficulty, worry about academic progress, accumulation of course duties, and fear of failure, as being major sources of academic stress for the students. Moreover, the research adds further weight to Miyoba (2021) who aimed to identify the various factors associated with stress among high school students in Lusaka, and reported that factors such as having limited time to study for examinations, lack of quality and quantity of sleep, as well as poor relationship with teachers were dominant sources of academic stress for students.

Coping Strategies of Students in FU Lafia

The study established that students utilize different coping strategies to manage academic stress, and among these include seeking professional counseling, seeking for social support from friends or family, frequently using social media, watching movies and listening to music. Additionally, it was revealed that students



seek out tutors, break their workload into bits and tackle each at a time, utilize candle, torchlights, and lamps to study when there is no electricity. Furthermore, students of Federal University of Lafia tend to study through the night to meet with academic demands, browse resources from Youtube, google, and also utilize the assistance of artificial intelligence in studying. The aforementioned can be broadly categorized as problem-focused coping strategies. However, FU Lafia students were found to also use emotion-focused coping strategies including seeing every situation as fate and leaving things in the hand of God.

This study findings echo the conclusion of Akunne and Nnadi (2021) who investigated the causes of stress among final year students in Nigerian tertiary institutions. They revealed that students cope with their academic stress by listening to music, hanging out with friends and relatives, watching movies and seeking professional counseling. Similarly, emotion-focused coping strategies found from the study substantiates the report of Yani et al. (2019) from their study of coping with the academic stress in Muhammadiyah University of Surakarta, Indonesia. They found that coping strategies employed by the students included seeking for comfort from spiritual belief by praying and accepting the reality and trying to live with it. Still, the findings above concur with that of Ogbogu (2017) who attempted to examine the problem of academic stress among students, its causes, symptoms, and ways of controlling it, and discovered that students were found to reduce the effect of academic stress with proper time management and routine exercise.

5. Conclusion and Recommendations

The Federal University of Lafia students experience various levels of academic stress, which impacts their health and academic performance. Symptoms include difficulty sleeping, feeling tired, and headaches. Students believe academic

stress affects their performance, leading to lack of concentration, reduced academic morale, and procrastination. The more stress, the lower the performance. To manage academic stress, the study recommends providing more opportunities for extracurricular activities, providing efficient guidance and counseling, and reducing unnecessary course loads. Management can help students enhance their health status and academic performance by providing more opportunities for extracurricular activities, efficient guidance, and reduced course loads.

The following recommendations are made on the basis of the findings that emerged from the study:

1. Based on the findings which shows that majority of students experience one kind of academic stress or the other, it is hereby recommended that the school management provide more facilities for extracurricular activities and create better awareness of such facilities and their benefit. Activities likes sports competition including football, tennis, volleyball, and other social events like picnics, talent shows, among others, should be organized for students in order to release them from distress.
2. The findings of the study showed that coping strategies that students may employ to manage academic stress could either positive or negative. It is therefore recommended that university should organize programs on academic stress management that will teach students how to appraise stressful events, develop coping skills and put these skills into practical use.



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