



The Nature, Causes and Effects of Stress vis-a-vis The Coping Strategies

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Abstract

Stress is most undermined syndrome in our society that is neglected since the element of mental health associated with it. Human beings generally, experience all kinds and forms of stress in their various fields of endeavors. Stress is any unpleasant and often disturbing emotional experience/feeling as a result of frustration (expected or not); it is often expressed in anger, anxiety, confusion, or discomfort, for example. Although not every of those symptoms are expressive of stress, sufferers endure so much agonizing experiences often resulting from an alteration of or interference with an individual's usual pattern of behavior. Many confuse stress with other similar conditions such as defense mechanism or other expressions of unusual/emotive behavior. Hence, this espousing analysis takes up the task of outlining the basic nature(s), common causes, and effects of stress (with special effort to distinguish it from similar psycho-physical conditions). It goes further to articulate several coping strategies with stress. The piece not only enlightens, it sensitizes patients/potential sufferers of stress on detecting and coping with the condition.

Keywords: Human nature, stress, psychology, coping strategy.

Introduction

In contemporary society, *stress* condition seems to be one of the most undermined syndrome; this is so, perhaps, neglected once the element of mental health associated with it. Human beings generally, experience all kinds and forms of stress in their various fields of endeavors. Stress could manifest in various ways in a person's everyday life and is seen as the body's responses, both neurologically and physiologically trying to adjust to another condition, individual modify so as to fit in the new condition. Such occasions that reason stress are called stressors. An abrupt change throughout everyday life or indication of stressors may influence an individual's way of life or even his/her physical and emotional well-being status (Imam, 2006). The effect a stressor leaves on an individual relies upon how the individual can adapt and deal with the circumstance.

On the off chance that the individual takes the occasion emphatically by tolerating it as a feature of difficulties of life and discover ways to manage it, the stress will be overseen satisfactorily and he/she will get over it. Then again, the result may influence the individual to have a delayed passionate unsettling influence and now and again injury. Adapting to the effect of stressors expects access to assortment of assets, differing from individual qualities to social help. What's more, these issues have been distinguished to incorporate individual, familial, institutional, ecological, statistic, social, and monetary (counting money related) support, among others. Therefore, the better the performance of an individual, the more competitive and rewarded the individual will be. Nevertheless, many factors have an impact on student's academic performance. Owiti (2001) describes that attitude leads to achievement and abilities are needed for successful performance. It is indisputable that students' lives are "burdened with stress, but failure to resolve the stress in the long-term could have serious professional and personal consequences" (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015).

Statement of the Research Problem

Stress (and sufferers' inability to cope with it) is increasingly becoming a part of daily lives. Many do encounter an array of stressful condition, and in most cases, are unable to develop coping mechanisms on their own to address the environment-driven stress and problems. All inclusive, the frequencies of stress and stress-related sicknesses (uneasiness and discouragement among students, learners, and qualified doctors, for instance) have expanded and gotten huge consideration in literature (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). The emerging literature indicate increase in death resulting from undiagnosed stressful conditions leading to high blood pressure-related health diseases such as stroke and paralysis. The heavy literature mostly diagnoses but rarely informs of the essential nature, causes and various ways of coping with stress. Thus, death rate increase by the numbers in Nigeria. Filling this gap in literature (particularly in Nigeria), accordingly, the point of this investigation is to distinguish basic types of stress, the common cause and remedies to it.

Research Questions

Specifically, the following research questions will guide this study:

- a. What is/are the meaning, nature and cause(s) of stress?
- b. What are the real, veiled or apparent effects of stress on the individual and society?
- c. What is/are the coping mechanisms or available ways to overcome stress?

Objectives and Significance of the Study

Although the overall objective of the study is to determine the meaning, nature and causes/effects of *stress*, the specific objectives are to:

- a. Determine what the meaning, nature and cause(s) of stress is/are;
- b. Establish the real, veiled or apparent effects of stress on the individual and society;
- c. Adumbrate the coping mechanism(s) or available ways to overcome stress.

Scope and Significance of the Study

One of the significance of this study is its contribution to stress management theoretical orientation. Every field of human endeavor is guided by a theory or set of theories. To this end, this study is significant as it contributes to the understanding the theory of stress and its management in society. More significantly, this study serves as a reference material for further research by scholars who may want to study various other aspects of stress that students may be facing in the course.

Research findings as outcomes of pain-staking effort by researchers are significant to the academia as they serve as reservoirs of knowledge in the chosen study area. Another area this study is significant is in the area of serving as a tool for policy makers on how to

Literature Review

Stress

Abundant material abound on the concept of stress. Broadly, the World Health Organization (WHO) defines stress as "the reaction people may have when pressures with demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which

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challenge their ability to cope”. Yet stress is not a disease. However, if stress is intense and goes on for some time, it can lead to mental and physical ill health (depression, nervous breakdown, for example)....

Forsyth and Steger (in press) suggest students adopt self-protective mechanisms, which are reflected in the types of coping strategies they utilize. Where the individual effectively applies such strategies they are able to "resolve problems, relieve emotional distress, and stay on track towards achieving their goals" (Brown *et al.*, 2005: 792). However, where students are effective in coping with the stress caused by such change for example, through the use of appropriate support structures, a tendency to experience better adjustment is seen (Pancer, Hunsberger, Pratt & Alisat, 2000). Yet, another way area that students face stress which affects their level of performance is in the area of settling down in the new university environment. It was in this light that Baker (2003) said that "For many undergraduate students, university life is a major transition in their lives since they are yet, one of the accorded the chance to decide what to do without the undue influence of their parents". This transition comes with opportunities with some concomitant discomforts. These discomforts have been described as stress or stressors in the literature. During this transition, the students make various decisions regarding all aspects of their lives such as academics, social life, and leisure activities (Baker, 2003; Ashford & Lawrence, 2006).

Stress, as per Meeks-Mitchell and Heit referred to it, (Oyerinde, 2008) is the non-explicit reaction of the body to any request made on it. Stress is a piece of the textures of human presence. Each individual paying little respect to race or social foundation, social, and word related status and even kids experience stress from numerous points of view (Oyerinde, 2008). The scientist centers around the evaluation of stress among undergrad nursing students of the University of Jos and its apparent effect on their academic performance. As per Bamuhair *et al* (2015) in their examination result on the stress that medicinal students' face contend that medical students face one of a kind academic difficulties that render them more defenseless against stress and nervousness than students of different controls. Their contention is fraught with inadequacy because their study did include students from the faculties of law, social sciences, engineering, pharmacy, sciences among others which would have afforded them the opportunity to ascertain the kind of unique academic stress that these students face which makes them vulnerable to stress that affect their academic performance. They went further to argue that college students, especially freshmen, are particularly prone to stress due to the transitional nature of college life, where college life compels students to acquire entirely new social skills and also to take responsibility for their own personal needs (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015).

Scholars have also dwelt on stressors that affect academic performance of students to include academic pressures and emotional factors. These stressors include: long lectures hours, lack of peer support, lack of recreational activities, financial strains, fear/threat from activities of cult-groups, different venues for different courses from different faculties, which are all reasons for stress associated with tertiary institution education and training as found in the Arab world which is also applicable to Nigeria and indeed the University of Benin (see Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). What the researchers failed to emphasize here is that the way these stressors generally affect students vary from student to another.

Some other scholars argue that the academic stress faced by most students is attributed to poor study habits, such as poor time management (Macan, Shahani, Dipboye and Phillips, 1990) and studying for exams (Baldwin, Wikinson and Barkley, 2009) and coursework which may eventually lead to poor academic performance. On his part, Arid (2006) contends that academic performance is mainly a function of students study habits referring to the student's way of study whether systematic, efficient, or inefficient (Abid, 2006). The academic performance of university students currently is explained in terms of quality of the grades obtained in terms of the grade point average (GPA) or cumulative grade point average (CGPA) (Bernold, Spulin and Anson, 2007) among others. It is true that student(s) reading and study habit can affect his/her performance, other factors that principally pre-dispose the levels and categories of stress were not captured by this array of scholars.

Another significant point to consider is that stress involves individual recognition. Reports have appeared of abnormal state of stress among medicinal, law, sociologies and designing students with various kinds of academic stressors (see Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). It has also been reported that student's perception of high stress levels may lead to poor academic performance, depression, attrition, and serious health problems (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). A different study on stress management suggested that monitoring student-stress and the methods utilized to deal with it could have valuable implications for higher education administrators (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). With all the evidence presented above on how the medical student life is burdened with stress.

Another issue is wrong course decision, just as close to home issues and money related imperatives (see Beach, 2003) and inability to determine understudy stress in the long haul could have genuine expert and individual results; notwithstanding, academic necessities, relations with employees and time weights are yet further wellsprings of stress; moreover, tests, grades, rivalry, time requests, proficient class condition, and worry about future vocations were observed to be significant wellspring of academic stress. Another significant point to consider in this examination is the students' view of the idea of stress (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015).

While Baumeister and Exline (2000) description of stress provides a complex concept of stress, it says little about how stress affects human academic and other performance. There is important variation between researchers about the direct and indirect properties of several suppose different factors which have to create stress in any situation. Direct stress special effects are those experienced by the mission capacity alone unrelatedly of any psychological stress that may also be generated. According to Rees and Redfern (2000) indirect stress effects are developed from psychological stressors related to task load requirements. There is an acceptable line that is mutual with these two, and they can sometimes not be distinguished.

This study investigated the effects of academic stress on the performance of different cognitive tasks, predicted that matte stress would interfere with work memory, leading to a breakdown in mathematical and related performance. Specifically, these authors measure the degree to which subjects were stressed using a self-reporting index shortly followed by a performance assessment of two measurements of the work environment reading team and calculation group. Their results suggest that people who score high on measurements or tensions tend to perform worse on work memory measurements.

While this was the case in both ways, it was not necessarily limited to just computational tasks, high stress subjects were more likely to demonstrate failure in computational results than listening outcomes. According to Bandura (2001) it is possible to learn an assignment and yet perform poorly in it. Academic success impact on the students because when you get success in their academic achievements then students feel relax and full confidence in their study. Other factors, other than the learning process and suffering have the potential of influencing academic performance on tasks. According to Tepas and Price (2001), stress can be viewed as, an agent, circumstance, situation, or variable that disturbs the normal functioning of the individual....

The Essential Meaning, Nature, Causes, and Effects of Stress

In the course of recent decades, there has been critical examination on the issues of stress and the board of stress (Dziegielewski, Turnage and Roest Marti, 2004). This is on the grounds that stress is a typical and unavoidable part in the lives of each person, paying little heed to race or social foundation (Newth, 2011). "Stress is a common element in the lives of every individual, regardless of race or cultural background" (Garrett, 2001). Based on the focus of this study, we will relate the definition of stress to university students' performance. As a matter of facts, university students have shown to possess a unique set of stressors which can affect their everyday experiences (Hall, 2005). The focus of this report is on stress and how it can affect academic performance. The question is, what is stress and how has scholars defined it?

Newth (2011) makes use of his first complex definition that stress is "an applied force or systems forces that tends to strain or deform a body" and his easy to understand definition that reads "it is a feeling of not being in control". In essence, stress could be described as the pressure or demands placed upon us and how we respond to those pressures. He went further to state that: "The background to modern day stress issues seems to be more widespread than ever and many of the reasons as to why these exist are quite obvious such as more work by less people, financial uncertainty, job insecurity, constant demands for high performance, the increase requirement for information, impossible targets, juggling part-time or full-time work and life/family priorities/children, health issues, the downsides of cyberspace and technology, time management, sleep deprivation, social activities, the depressing state of affairs in many parts of the world and much more besides" (Newth, 2011).

Stress is best portrayed as a circumstance where ecological requests surpass the limit with respect to viable reaction by the individual and can possibly have physical and mental outcomes (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). Stress that students of higher institutions face, can either be do them good or harm in relation to their academic performance. Without dwelling on the harm or the good aspect of stress, let us examine the meaning of stress from the point of view of scholars who did some research work in the area. Stress is a nonspecific response of the body to a demand. It is the consequence or failure to adapt to change, specifically the inability to respond appropriately to emotional or physical threats to the organism whether actual or imagined. Stress is personal and unique to each individual such that what may be relaxing to one person may be stressful to another (Keil, 2004). Stress has been adjudged as a phenomenon that affects human life in different dimensions.

It is described as an internal pressure; feeling of unease, or fear attached to specific objects or situations, a personality characteristic of responding to certain situations. It is seen as a stimulus that interfere with the biological as well as psychological balance of an organism (Udoh & Ajala, 2005). Stress has different meanings in different contexts. Stress can be external to us. We think of stress as something that happens to us – that is, as situations that push us to the limit or threaten our safety or well-being. Or stress can be the relentless onslaught of difficulties, such as being late on a term paper, the car breaking down, realizing there is no money in the checking account, and then getting into a fight with a roommate all in one week. We call these events that push us to the limit or exceed our ability to manage the situation at hand stressors. The focus on the situation that causes stress is known as the stimulus view of stress.

In contrast, stress can be internal to us; we can think of it as the feeling we experience when events are too much to handle. The response view of stress has focused on the physiological changes that occur when someone encounters an excessively challenging situation. Clearly stress is much more than being in certain situations, and it is much more than physiological responses. It exists within the relationship between the external events and the internal responses. Stress emerges from people's interpretations of the relevance of certain stressors to their lives and their ability to deal with them. This relational view of stress holds that stress is a particular relationship between the people and the situations in which they find themselves.

Certain events demand an overwhelming amount of our energy and time. Any number of things can be stressors: unpleasant situations, such as divorce, financial troubles, or being sick; or pleasant situations, such as a wedding or the birth of a child. Psychologists measure stress as a stimulus by quantifying the number of stressors a person experiences during a given period. Two major categories of stressors are major life events and daily hassles. Stress is defined as the response to events that threaten or challenges a person. Stress refers to inner and outer demands, which may be physiologically arousing and emotionally taxing and call for cognitive or behavioural responses (Western, 2002). Averach and Grambling (2006) defines stress as an unpleasant state of emotional and psychological arousal that people experience in situations that they perceive as dangerous or threatening to their well-being.

In our society today, people are going through a lot of stress emerging from excessive exposure to severe hardship, poverty and serious life exhausting struggle for survival. Genyi and Deakaa (2005) observed that there is however no doubt that the institution of family has come under attack and strong influence by social, economic and technological forces. To this extent, Nigeria's economic crisis has had significant negative impact on the family. According to Romeo and McEwen (2006) stress is the feeling an individual gets when trying to balance the ever-growing demands of work with the never-ending needs of family. Vander-Zanden (1993) posits that stress neither resides in the individual nor in the situation alone but in how an individual defines a particular (stressful) event. Consequently, some individuals seem to be more stress-resistant than others, by virtue of the attitudes they bring to influence their lives.

According to Lazarus and Folkman (2012) stress is a "nonspecific response of the body to any demands made upon it". In other words, as demands are made on an individual, or as

situations arise, the body attempts to adjust or adapt to the situation in order to reestablish normalcy. They further stated that, there is a series of physiological reactions that occurs in response to environmental demands or any noxious stimulus. The definition of stress depends on whose theory one follows.

Theorists and researchers have defined stress in terms of external forces, internal responses, and an interaction of the two. According to Selye (2000) one of the first researchers to consider its effects, stress is a nonspecific response to real or imagined challenges or threats. Theorists who consider stress as a response define a stressor as an environmental stimulus that affects an organism, producing physical and psychological effects such as physical arousal and psychological tension and anxiety. Stress results from a cognitive appraisal of situations involving challenges or threats. Looking at this view, not all people view a situation in the same way; a person must appraise a situation as stressful for it to be stressful. Each of these views of stress has been important in guiding psychologist's research.

The broad definition recognizes that everyone experiences stress at times, but also that stress is an interpreted state; it is a response by an individual. Lazarus (2007), a leader in the study of emotion and stress, asserts that people actively negotiate between the demands of the environment (stressors) and personal beliefs and behaviours. Therefore, stress is the result of an interaction of events and people's evaluation of those events. Cognitive researchers refer to this active negotiation as cognitive appraisal. Sometimes the arousal that stressors bring about initiates positive actions; sometimes its effects are detrimental.

What influences an individual's cognitive appraisal, determining whether a particular event

will be stressful? The answer lies in the extent to which the person is familiar with the event, how much she or he has anticipated the event, and how much control she or he has over the event and the response to it. For example, the first day of a new course brings excitement and some apprehension about the instructor's expectations and whether the time commitments for the course will be burdensome; the second or third time the class meets is usually much less worrisome.

When people could predict events and are familiar with them, they feel more in control, more confident that they can have some impact on the future. That is, when people appraise that they have the resources to cope with an event, that event is not a threat. When people believe that they lack the resources to cope with a threat, then they experience stress. This view of stress includes a wider variety of potential stressors plus individual evaluation of these events. The definitions of stress fall into three categories: stress as a stimulus, stress as a response, and stress as interaction between an organism and its environment.

This classification corresponds very closely to the three models of stress identified by Cox (2003) as described below: The engineering model sees external stresses giving rise to a stress reaction, or strain, in the individual. That stress is located in the stimulus characteristics of the environment; stress is what happens to a person (not what happens within a person). This concept is derived from Hooke's law of elasticity in physics, which deals with how loads (stress) produce deformation in metals. Up to a point, stress is inevitable and can be tolerated, and moderate levels may even be beneficial. Complete absence of stress (as measured, say, by

anxiety or physiological arousal could be positively detrimental (for example you are so relaxed that you fail to notice the car speeding towards you as you are crossing the road). Stress helps to keep us alert, providing some of the energy required to maintain an interest in our environment, to explore it and adapt to it. However, when we are 'stretched beyond our limits of elasticity; it becomes positively harmful.

The physiological model is primarily concerned with what happens within the person as a result of stress (the 'response' aspects of the engineering model) in particular the physiological changes. The impetus for this view of stress was Selye's (2002) definition that 'stress' is the nonspecific response of the body to any demand made upon it, while a medical student, Selye noticed a general malaise or syndrome associated with being ill, regardless of the particular illness. The syndrome was characterized by (i) a loss of appetite; (ii) an associated loss of weight and strength; (iii) loss of ambition; and (iv) a typical facial expression associated with illness. Further examination of extreme cases revealed major physiological changes (confirmed by Cox, 1979). This Non-specific response to illness reflected a distinct phenomenon, which Selye called General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS).

The transactional model represents a kind of the first two models. It sees stress as arising from an interaction between people and their environment- in particular, when there is an imbalance between the person's perception of the demand being made of them by the situation, and their ability to meet those demands. As it is the person's perception of this mismatch between demand and ability that cause stress, the model allows for important individual differences in what produces stress and how much stress is experienced. There are also wide differences in how people attempt to cope with stress, psychologically and behaviourally.

The engineering model is mainly concerned with the question 'what causes stress?', and the physiological model with question 'what are the effects of stress?' The transactional model is concerned with both these questions, plus 'How do we cope with stress?'

Types of stress

Stress is a physical and psychological response to perceived demands and pressure. In the stress response, people mobilize physical and emotional resources to cope with the demand and pressures. Psychologists distinguish four varieties of stress.

- *Acute stress* is what most people associate with the term stress. Acute stress results from the sudden onset of demands and is experienced as tension, headaches, emotional upsets, gastrointestinal disturbances, feeling of agitation, and pressure. September 11, 2001, was a day of acute stress for many people. Even for persons not directly involved in the terrible events of that day, many experienced the stress that comes from feeling that events are not under control (Peterson & Seligman, 2003).
- *Episodic acute stress* is more serious in the sense that it refers to repeated episodes of acute stress, such as a weekend job that is stressful or having to meet a deadline each month. Episodic acute stress can lead to migraines, hypertension, stroke, anxiety, depression, or serious gastrointestinal distress.
- *Traumatic stress* refers to a massive instance of acute stress, the effects of which can reverberate for years or even a lifetime. Traumatic stress differs from acute stress mainly in terms of the symptoms associated with the stress response. This collection of symptoms,

called posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD), is a syndrome that occurs in some persons following the experience of or witnessing life-threatening events, such as military combat, natural disasters, terrorist incidents, serious accidents, or violent personal assaults such as rape. Many persons in the United States experienced symptoms of PTSD after the September 11 terrorist tragedy. A study of refugees fleeing the war in Kosovo found that over 60 percent of them showed symptoms of PTSD (Ai, Peterson & Ubelhor, 2002). People who suffer from PTSD often relive the experience through nightmares or intense flashbacks, have difficulty sleeping, have physical complaints, have flattered emotions, and feel detached or estranged from others. These symptoms can be severe enough and last long enough to significantly impair the person's daily life such as having trouble with personal relationships or difficulty holding down a job.

- *Chronic stress* is another serious form of stress. It refers to stress that does not end. Day in and day out, chronic stress grinds us down until our resistance is gone. Serious systemic illness, such as diabetes, decreased immune system functioning, or cardiovascular disease, can result from chronic stress.

Causes of stress

Psychologists, Psychiatricians, Counselors and Medical experts who are concerned about behaviour and its various normal and abnormal manifestations, described stress as uncomfortable and unhealthy force that upsets our physical, psychological, emotional and mental well-being which is caused by different activities, events and life experiences. Measures of psychological causes have to do with some self-related Issues like inner impulse, emotions, traits temperaments, dispositions, personality, self-image, self-concept, conflict between inner self and outside world and one's inability to satisfy aspirations and goals in life. Lahey (2003) gave frustration and conflict within self, between self and others and self and environmental factors as basic sources of stress. Aggarwal (2007) cited intrapsychic conflict between id, ego and super ego as stressful and poses challenges to cope with life. Other emotional causes are aggression, quarreling, fighting and nagging.

Psychologists and scholars like Murkherjee (2005); Sharma (2007); Lahey (2003) agreed that most life event whether positive or negative could lead to stress. This includes daily hustles, family and socio-economic engagements such as ceremonies, festivities, traveling, marriage, child birth, entering school and graduation, entering occupation, promotion, social responsibilities, leadership and retirement. According to Erickson cited in Santrock (2001) our encounters or interpersonal relation with others at every stage of life has positive and negative implication, which causes stress and inability to cope and function well. The negative social related causes are divorce, conflicts, violence, crimes, assaults, victimization, hostility, deprivations, and failure in our personal, family or social commitments, financial problems and unemployment.

Natural and artificial happenings such as flood, hurricanes, earthquake, humidity, volcanic eruption, erosion, oil spillage, air pollution, wars, accidents, noises, hot and cold season, are known to cause stress. Paul and Adams as cited in Lahey (2003) revealed that volcanic eruption was extremely stressful to the residents of Othello near Washington where 200 percent stress related physical illness and psychological disorder were experienced and the number of death increase by 19%. Similarly, physical assault, wars, terrorism were noted as

causes of stress. Studies on the effect of September 11, 2001 attack on World Trade Centre and Pentagon found, that intrusive flash back were common symptoms for those near the attack and those who lost their loved ones and possessions.

Balarabe (2003) states that causes of stress among students have to do with lack of adequate feeding, clothing, accommodation and utilities like water, electricity, waste disposal, transportation, physical health, recreation and relaxation. He further states that strained relationship with students, lecturers and other significant people in the life of the students causes stress. The demands of Academic work such as difficulties with study; not having the requisite learning facilities, un-conducive learning environment, incompetent/unsupportive lecturers etc. are also causes of stress for students.

Leon-Guerrero (2009) in writing on the topic “The Stress and Strain of Life” tried to answer the question “what is the cause of stress?” simply put, he said stress occurs when the nervous system has been overworked because of a score of everyday worries. He explained that problems that are real or imaginary, past, present or future have sapped the vitality of the nerve until they are unable to behave normally. Lazarus (2000) expresses the view that conditions place the organism under strain, the homeostatic mechanism no longer operate smoothly and that if the stresses continue, the organism may suffer injury as a consequence of its own efforts to meet the stress. In his opinion, the agents and events that can place the organism under stress include infections, nervous strain, physical injury, excessive heat or cold and muscular fatigue.

Iwuji (2003) in her work describes stress as part of life and that; living is a continuous battle with stress. She affirms that in order to ensure man’s survival and exploration of his environment, nature built into him some stress factors to spur him into action. According to her, it was the stress or discomfort of hunger that led man to cultivate food and that sexual stress leads to procreation and continuation of life. Her studies show that almost every critical event of our life such as marriage, death of a spouse, change of financial position or ceremonial occasion carries with it certain amount of stress.

Causes of stress are usually linked with stressful or unpleasant events, or traumatic consequences that befall an individual such as losing a job, death of an only child, or having difficulty with domestic chores at home or difficulties with learning at school. Holmes and Rahe in VanderZanden (2010) developed a 43 item Social Readjustment Rating Scale to measure the amount of stress required by life events using “Life-change Units” on a scale from 1 to 100. They ranked the following (among others) as the top 10 causes of stress: death of spouse, divorce/marital separation, death of close family member, personal injury/illness, frequent marital conflict, economic hardship, amongst others.

Some environments may be hazardous to people’s health. A neighborhood environment may contain many factors that contribute to stress. Many of these factors revolve around poverty and the communities in which poor people live. People in low socioeconomic groups often live in overcrowded and substandard housing, lack access to services such as banks and stores, experience high noise levels, and live with the threat of crime and violence (Selye, 2010). These situations often combined to produce the type of stressors called hassles, such as having

trouble cashing a check, and the type of life events that are related to PTSD, such as witnessing or being the victim of violence.

Even people who are wealthy do not escape the stresses of urban living. Taylor (2006) formulated the term urban stress to describe the multitude of factors that combine in modern urban life. These factors include crowding, pollution, noise, commuting stress, and fear of crime. Taylor argues that these factors are a constant presence for city dwellers, and their combination produces a level of stress that is not accounted for by each stressor considered individually. These environments can be detrimental in several ways - when safety is threatened, when the environment prevents people from forming social ties, and when conflicts occur in schools, in families, and on the street. Lack of time is another common source of stress. Everyone faces deadlines: students must complete tests before class ends. They have only a limited number of hours each day in which to accomplish tasks, and students who work long hours often have no time for leisure. If they do not handle time pressure successfully, they may begin to feel overloaded and stressed (Zubairu, 2008).

Other causes of stress include long-lasting ill-health mental or physical disability, alcoholism, family conflict, failure in academic work, lack of suitable play outlets etc. These stress syndromes make the student to develop acute or chronic stress whose effects are very damaging not only to his mental health, but to his existence.

The causes of stress don't exist objectively, and individuals differ in what they see as a stressor in the first place ((Lazarus, 2000). The kinds of event or experience that most people are likely to find exceed their capacity to handle the demands that are involved. The word 'circadian' (meaning 'about one day') describes a particular periodicity or rhythm of a number of physiological and behavioural functions that can be seen in almost all living creatures. Many studies have shown that these rhythms persist if we suddenly reverse our activity pattern and sleep during the day and are active during the night. This indicates that these rhythms are internally controlled (endogenous). However, our circadian rhythms are kept on their once-every-24-hours schedule by regular daily environmental (exogenous) cues called *zeitgebers* (from the German meaning 'time givers'). The most important *zeitgeber* is the daily cycle of light and dark. If we persist with our reversal of sleep and activity, the body's circadian rhythms will (after a period of acclimatization) reverse and become synchronized to the new set of exogenous cues. Some people take five to seven days to adjust, others take up to 14 days, and some may never achieve a complete reversal. But not all physiological functions reverse at the same time: body temperature usually reverses inside a week for most people, while the rhythms of adrenocortical hormone take much longer.

During the changeover period, the body is in a state of internal desynchronisation. This is very stressful, and shift workers often report experiencing insomnia, digestive problems, irritability, fatigue, even depression, when changing work shifts. Among fresh students, the *zeitgebers* stay the same, but students are forced to adjust their natural sleep-wake cycles in order to meet the demands of university environment. According to Snyder (2001) the psychosocial transitions that are most dangerous to health are those that are sudden and allow little time for preparation. The sudden death of a relative from a heart attack, in an accident or as a result of crime are examples of the most stressful kind of life changes. Morgan, Richard, Weisz and Schoplar (2001) found that life events stress was more closely related to psychiatric

symptoms (in particular, depression and anxiety) among people rated as high on external locus of control, than among those rated as high on internal locus of control. In other words, people who believe that they don't have control over what happens to them are more vulnerable to the harmful effects of change than those who believe they do.

Hassles are the irritating, frustrating, distressing demands that to some degree characterize everyday transactions with the environment. They include annoying practical problems, such as losing things or traffic jams and fortuitous occurrences such as inclement weather, as well as arguments, disappointments, and financial and family concerns. Daily uplifts are positive experiences such as the joy derived from manifestations of love, relief at hearing good news, the pleasure of a good night rest, and so on. In a study of 100 men and women aged 45 – 64 over a 12- month period, Delongis, (2000) confirmed the prediction that hassles were positively related to undesirable psychological symptoms.

But the effect of uplifts was unclear, and research interest waned. Mc Ewen (2001) also found that hassles were a more powerful predictor of symptoms than life events (as measured by the Social Readjustment Rating Scale SRRS): Divorce, for example, may exert stress by any number of component hassles, such as cooking for oneself, handling money matters and having to tell people about it. So, daily hassles, may intervene between major life events and health. It is the cumulative impact of these day-to-day problems that may prove detrimental to health. According to Lazarus (2007) life events (as measured by the SRRS) are distal (remote) causes of stress. We need to know the psychological meaning a person attaches to an environmental events, the personal significance of what's happening (the proximal cause). Although daily hassles are far less dramatic than major life changes and what constitutes a hassle varies greatly from person to person, research has suggested that, especially when they pile up or touch on special areas of vulnerability they can be very stressful for some people and very important for their subjective well-being and physical health.

Borod (2000) claims that implicit in the concept of hassles is a stimulus based definition of stress. This is inconsistent with the transactional approach advocated by Lazarus. This apparent contradiction stems from focusing on the hassles themselves, while simultaneously believing that it's their psychological meaning that causes stress.

Effects of stress

So far, various opinions expressed on the meaning and causes of stress have been examined. There is no doubt that stress will constitute serious problems that distract the students from maximum academic output and effective social life. Therefore, it is relevant to examine some of the opinion expressed on the effects that stress can have on people, particularly on students at the tertiary level of education. Stress makes an individual to be constantly tensed, worried and can edge such that he or she is in panic, fear, and feels threatened (Kiel, 2004).

This state of disorder distorts mental, school, family and responsibilities such that an individual's interactions, competence and productivity diminish. In work place, he / she is not efficient, and unable to meet deadlines. In school he/she lack concentration and performs poorly, in the family, he is harsh to his kids and wife and is prone to engage in physical

battering and abuse. From a biological perspective, it seems that a high-arousal fight-or-flight biological mechanism sculpted by evolution to help us survive life - threatening physical stressors may be maladaptive for dealing with the psychological stressors of modern life. In terms of survival, taking an examination or sitting in rush-hour traffic is not equivalent to an attack by a hungry tiger, where high arousal could facilitate fighting or fleeing. In Selye's view, our physiological responses may thereby take an unnecessary toll on our physical and psychological well-being. Selye's work inspires a generation of psychological and medical researchers to explore the effects of stress on psychological and physical well-being.

According to Selye (2010) the General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) represents the body defence against stress. The body responds in the same way to any stressor, whether it's environmental or arises from within the body itself. Selye initially observed that injecting extracts of ovarian tissue into rats produce enlargement of the adrenal glands, shrinkage of the thymus gland, and bleeding ulcers. When he used extracts of other organs (Pituitary, kidney, spleen), as well as substances not derived from bodily tissue, the same responses were produced. He eventually found that the same „triad“ of „non-specific responses could be produced by such different stimuli as insulin, excessive cold or heat x-rays, sleep and water deprivation and electric shock. GAS comprises three stages: the alarm reaction, resistance and exhaustion. Alarm reaction: When a stimulus is perceived as a stressor, there's a brief, initial shock phase. Resistance to the stressor is lowered. But this is quickly followed by the counter shock phase. The sympathetic branch of the ANS is activated, which, in turn, stimulates the adrenal medulla to secrete increased levels of adrenaline and noradrenaline (catecholamines).

These are associated with sympathetic changes, collectively referred to as the fight or flight syndrome. The catecholamines mimic sympathetic arousal (“sympathomimetics”), and noradrenaline is the transmitter at the synapses of the sympathetic branch of the ANS. Consequently, noradrenaline from the adrenals prolongs the action of noradrenaline released at synapses in the ANS. This prolongs sympathetic arousal after the stressor's removal. Resistance: If the stressor isn't removed, there's a decrease in sympathetic activity, but an increase in output from the other part of the adrenal gland, the adrenal cortex. This is controlled by the amount of adrenocorticotrophic hormone (ACTH) in the blood. ACTH is released from the anterior pituitary (the „master“ endocrine gland) on instructions from the hypothalamus. The adrenal cortex is essential for the maintenance of life and its removal results in death. The effect of ACTH is to stimulate the adrenal cortex to release corticosteroids, one group of which is the glucocorticoid hormones. These control and conserve the amount of glucose in the blood which is to resist stress of all kinds. Exhaustion: Once ACTH and corticosteroids are circulating in the bloodstream, they tend to inhibit the further release of ACTH from the pituitary. If the stressor is removed during the resistance stage, blood sugar levels will gradually return to normal. But when the stress situation continues, the pituitary-adrenal excitation will continue. The body's resources are now becoming depleted, the adrenal can no longer function properly, blood glucose levels drop and, in extreme cases, hypoglycaemia could result in death. It's at this stage that psychophysiological disorders develop, including high blood pressure (hypertension) heart disease (coronary artery disease, CAD), coronary heart disease (CHD), asthma and peptic (stomach) ulcers. Selye called these the diseases of adaptation. Effects of stress on psychological well-being are clearest and most dramatic among people who have experienced catastrophic life events.

Rubonis and Bickman (2001) surveyed the result of 52 studies of victims of catastrophic floods, hurricanes and fires in the wake of natural disasters, they found an average increase of 17 percent in rates of psychological disorders such as anxiety and depression. Some women who experience the trauma of rape have psychological scars that are intense and long-lasting. In one long-term study of female 28 rape victims, a quarter of the women felt that they had not recovered psychologically six years after the rape (Valent, 2000). Even more common stressors such as unemployment leave scars. Many medical and psychological researchers have therefore concluded that stress causes distress, and this conclusion has been widely accepted among the general public and in the mass media. There are indications that stress can combine with other physical and psychological factors to influence the entire spectrum of physical illnesses, from the common cold to cancer, heart disease, diabetes and sudden death (Valent, 2000). Sometimes the effects are immediate. Earthquake, flood, collapsed buildings, hurricane e.t.c are examples of such physical factors that cause heart attacks and sudden death. Other effects of major stressor on physical well-being are less immediate but no less severe within one month following the death of a spouse, bereaved widowers begin to show a higher mortality rate than married people of the same age who have not lost a spouse (Feldman, 2009), and within one year of spousal death, about two-thirds of bereaved people decline to health.

A notably increased rate of mortality is found in men, who tend to respond to the death of their spouse with relatively greater distress and health declines than do women (Rubonis & Bickman., 2000). Stressful life events have also been linked to a higher risk of developing cancer. Linked to a long-term stress and illness are not surprising, for physiological responses to stressors can directly harm other body systems. For example, the secretion of stress hormones, such as epinephrine, norepinephrine and cortisol, is a major part of stress response.

These hormones affect the activity of the heart, and excessive secretions can damage the lining of the arteries. By reducing fat metabolism, the stress hormones can also contribute to the fatty blockages in arteries that cause heart attacks and strokes (Myers, 2005). Stress can also contribute to health breakdown by causing people to behave in ways that increase the risk of illness. For example, people with diabetes can frequently control their disease through medication, exercise and diet. When under stress, however, diabetics are less likely to regulate their diets and take their medications, resulting in an increased risk of serious medical consequences (Feency & Foa, 2000). People are also more likely to quit exercising when under stress, even if the primary reason they began exercising in the first place was to reduce stress. Stress may also lead to smoking, alcohol and drug use, sleep loss, undereating or overeating, and other health-compromising behaviours. Poor dietary and sleep patterns in students studying for examinations may increase risk of illness and help ruin the semester break.

It is clear that stress can temporarily weaken the immune system and put one under too much stress, the body becomes exhausted. If one is stressed, one is exposed to risk factors for disease (Selye, 2010). For example, smokers may smoke more if they are stressed, and people who drink alcohol to relieve stress, may have heart attack or stroke may develop certain diseases which may lead to pre-mature death (Johnson & Malow-Iroff, 2003). It is clear that stress can cause a lot of harm to an individual. When a person is exposed to a stressful event or situation, he first experiences an alarm reaction, which mobilizes his body to meet the threat by

secreting the stress hormones. These hormones (adrenaline and cortisol), in turn, prepare the individual body for actions against the stress event as follows:

- i. The heart rate and blood pressure increases, forcing blood to part of the body that may need it for strenuous physical activity.
- ii. Individual's digestion slows or ceases, so that more blood is unavailable to other organs.
- iii. The breathing rate accelerates to provide increased oxygen to blood stream.
- iv. The muscle is tensed up in preparation for an emergency response or action.
- v. The individuals' perspiration increases, acting as a coolant to cool the body.
- vi. Clotting agents are released in the person's blood to prevent loss of blood in case of injury (Lazarus, 2007).

Research has shown that these physiological stress responses or stress reactions can actually depress the immune system of the individual, thereby setting the stage for the individual's body to be attacked by a variety of illness (Vander-Zanden, 2009). Also research conducted by Fritz, Nagurney and Helgeson (2003) in USA, reveals that high levels of psychological stress can nearly double a person's chances of catching other illnesses, while at the same time such an individual's resistance to viral infection is appreciably lowered. These finding has a link with diseases. Stress plays a role in the onset and progress of cancer in humans.

It is also found that, circumstances of extreme stress, such as that experienced by torture victims can contribute to long term mental and neurologic symptoms, including: impaired memory, anxiety, depression, sleep disturbances, sexual dysfunction among others. All these, put together, can lead to irreversible brain damage associated with cerebral atrophy (Rasmussen & Lande, 2004). Whereas, adequate sleep is vital for proper brain functioning, especially in children, research has shown that stress hormones can actually modify sleep-wakefulness cycles (Laura, 2007). He also reported that people who regularly do not get enough sleep on account of stress, can become less sensitive to insulin. This situation therefore increases children and adult risk for diabetes and high blood pressure both of which are serious threat to brain development and function in children.

Diego (2004) in his research evidence states that prenatal and early life stress in children can have profound long-term effects on the developing central nervous system (CNS) and its regulation of basic physiology and immune function of the human body. His study further reveal that early life stresses can actually lead to later cognitive (mental) impairment as the child develops to adulthood. Also, according to Diego (2004), stresses such as child neglect and child abuse during infancy may result into such effects as memory loss and impaired cognitive abilities that manifest later in life of the individual. Further research suggests that, the gradual collapse of the immune system in the child as a result of stress may be due, in part, to deficits in nitric oxide (NO), which acts as signaling system in the brain known to connect the immune and stress systems (Richardson, Lee, Seo & Rivier, 2004).

Research evidence has also estimated that two-thirds of all visits to physicians in health institutions are generally for stress-related problems. Consequently, recent research findings indicate that the physical changes associated with stress may account for the leading causes of human death especially cardiovascular (heart) diseases and cancer (Romeo, McEwen & Folkman, 2006). The stress effects on the child's mental health development include the

following: i. Stress can cause digestive upsets, headaches, back pain and chronic fatigue even without much exertion from the affected individual. ii. Stress reduces the immune system of the body, thereby making the person more susceptible to catch colds and other diseases. iii. Constant stress increases blood pressure (high BP) and, as such increases or enhances the person's risk for stroke. iv. Stress triggers behavior that contributes easily to death and disability, such as (a) smoking, which leads to lung cancer or bronchitis, (b) alcoholism, (c) drug abuse (d) overeating. v. Effect of stress leads to diminished sexual desire (i.e sexual dysfunction) and inability to reach orgasm. According to Lazarus and Folkman (2007), the extent to which an individual experiences stress effect depends on the appraisal he makes of the stressful situation at three points in time i.e:- The relevance, positive, or potential danger posed by the event. ii. The ability of the person to cope with or handle the new event or stressful situation. iii. How much stress the situation actually causes the person involved.

Stress: The Coping Strategies

Coping, according to Aldwin (2001) refers to the thought and behaviour we use to handle stress or anticipated stress with individual differences in coping style impressively large. Variability in coping style became clearer to the researcher when two of her friends lost their husbands through cancer. While one of them could not stand the stress of speaking or returning pleasantries to their sympathizers, the other organized the funeral service, read her husbands funeral oration while greeting all that attended with warmth and strength although both had had wonderful relationships with their husbands, they responded to their situations in different ways.

For a psychologist, coping is the process by which a person takes some action to manage, master, tolerate, or reduce environmental and internal demands that cause or might cause stress and that will tax the individual's inner resources. This definition of coping involves five important assumptions. First, coping is constantly changing and being evaluated and is therefore a process or a strategy. Second, coping involves managing situations, not necessarily bringing them under complete control. Third, coping is effortful; it does not happen automatically. Fourth, coping aims to manage cognitive as well as behavioural events. Finally, coping is learned.

Types of coping strategies

Although, there are countless ways people might respond to stressors, coping strategies can be divided into three broad classes: Problem-focused coping, Emotion-focused coping, and Seeking social support. Problem- focused coping strategies attempt to confront and directly deal with the demands of the situation or to change the situation so that it is no longer stressful. Examples of Problem –focused strategy may include studying for a test, going directly to another person to work out a misunderstanding, or signing up for a course to improve one's time management skills. Problem-focused coping involves strategies that aim to change the situation that is creating stress. For example, if your roommate plays a stereo loudly while you are sleeping, you might choose to discuss it with her, buy earplugs, or cut the speaker wires. Each of these choices is a form of problem-focused coping, as each is geared toward changing the situation that created the stress. Examples of problem-focused coping strategies include devising a plan to solve the problem, seeking social support as a way to gather information, and

taking assertive action. Problem-focused coping tends to focus attention on the stress-provoking situation, and we are most likely to use it when we feel that we can do something to change the situation.

Lazarus and Folkman (2007) describe several forms of emotion-focused coping, including reappraisal, the emotional regulation strategy of reevaluation of a situation in light of new information or additional thought; distancing, or attempting to separate oneself from an emotional experience; escape-avoidance, wishful thinking or doing something to get one's mind off the situation (such as going to the movies); seeking social support by talking with friends for purposes of emotional support; self-control, or trying to regulate one's feelings or actions regarding the problem; and accepting responsibility, acknowledging one's role in the stress-eliciting situation. Emotion-focused coping may be beneficial when a situation is beyond one's control, and certain types of emotion-focused coping especially reappraisal- can be helpful in regulating the emotional aspects of stress. But it can also be problematic. Willful suppression of upsetting emotions, which is a form of self-control, can lead to chronic physiological arousal and is associated with poor psychological adjustment (Gross, Richards & John, 2006). Moreover, some strategies that we use to reduce the experience of distress, such as drinking, smoking, and other forms of drug use, may be maladaptive.

It is widely believed that a good way to cope with stress is to vent, or "let it all out". The implication is that relieving ourselves of a burden can be beneficial. Feldman (2009) developed and tested a technique known as emotional disclosure that enables people to unburden. In a typical emotional disclosure task, people are instructed to write for about 15 minutes about a recent emotional experience – in particular, one that they have found troubling, that still bothers them from time to time, and that they haven't discussed much with other people. Emotional disclosure consistently improves a number of health outcomes, including health variables related to HIV/AIDS, immune function, and cancer. How might writing about one's emotional experiences, especially traumatic ones benefit health? There are several possible explanations, people in most cultures believe that confession is beneficial. For the Ndembu of West Africa, for instance, public confession allows for the transformation of negative feelings into positive ones in the community, thereby promoting social harmony (Mathren, 2000).

It is also thought that not working through difficult emotions taxes the body, as research on the association between emotional suppression and ANS arousal suggests. When confession or disclosure occurs, then, one should observe a decrease in sympathetic nervous system activation or a return to a more relaxed state. In fact, numerous laboratory studies have found that just talking about a traumatic event creates noticeable reductions in autonomic measures such as blood pressure and sweating (Diego, 2004). A third class of coping strategies involves seeking social support that is, turning to others for assistance and emotional support in times of stress....

Social networks also reduce exposure to other risk factors, such as loneliness. Third, having the backing of others can increase one's sense of control over stressors. Finally, true friends can apply social pressure to prevent people from coping with stressors in maladaptive ways (e.g, through alcohol or drug use). Social support benefits the giver as well as the recipient. In one five - year longitudinal study of elderly people, Leibenluff (2002) found that those who gave help and support to friends, relatives and family members had lower mortality

rates than those who did not, even when health and other quality-of-life variables were statistically controlled. Likewise, highly sociable people are more resistant to infectious diseases, despite their greater exposure to other people who might be contagious. Considerable evidence suggests that high levels of social support can have beneficial effects on health and well-being. There are, however, a number of studies reporting contradictory findings.

Social support has been associated with, for example, adverse effects on well-being (Resick, 2005), and has even been shown to aggravate the effects of stressors. One explanation for the sometimes equivocal relationship between social support and decreased psychological distress comes from a study by Schwarzer (2000). The data showed that receiving social support was associated with distress among a sample of “disabled” individuals, because receiving support threatened the equitable balance of their social relationships. In other words, the distress resulted from people wondering if they could ever „pay back” the donor of social support. Although people often used several coping methods in dealing with a stressor, problem focused coping methods and seeking social support were most often associated with favourable adjustment to stressors. In contrast, emotion-focused strategies that involved avoiding feelings or taking things out on other people predicted depression and poorer adjustment. Other studies have yielded similar results. In children and adults and across many different types of stressors, emotion-focused-strategies that involve avoidance, denial and wishful thinking seem to be related to less effective adaptation (Valent, 2000).

On the other hand, there are adaptive emotion-focused strategies, such as identifying and changing irrational negative thinking and learning relaxation skills to control arousal. When you are transgressed against by someone else for example, people often think negatively about this person, reacting by experiencing unforgiveness. One emotion-focused strategy that has been shown to reduce stressful reactions to such transgression is by forgiving the other person thereby changing negative thinking (Gross, Richards & John, 2006). Such emotion-focused strategies can thus be effective methods for reducing stress responses without avoiding or distorting reality. More recently, researchers have studied differences between problem-focused strategies and emotion-focused strategies (Lazarus & Folkman, 200). Problem-focused coping attempts to deal directly with the situation, viewing it as a problem to be solved. By contrast, emotion focused coping concentrates on the individual’s internal emotional state, and leads to avoiding the problem, blaming oneself, or engaging in fantasy or wishful thinking as responses to the stressful situation.

Unlike Selye’s model, Lazarus and Folkman did not suggest that one strategy is always preferable. Instead, they suggested that problem-focused strategies are more likely to be used when the situation is perceived as being controllable for example in dealing with work-related stressful situations. By contrast, they argued that emotion-focused coping is likely to occur in dealing with situations that are perceived as not controllable for examples, health problems or a natural disaster (such as one’s home being destroyed by a storm). Research suggests that matching of strategy and perceived control does tend to occur, but interestingly, the results do not demonstrate that changing coping strategies necessary leads to less stress (Zakowski, Hall, Klein & Baum, 2001). In fact, a recent study indicates that the combination of both forms of coping strategies is most effective in handling stress (Sideridis, 2006). Clearly, a number of factors influence stress, both within the individual and within the situation.

While it would be appealing to end this discussion with a precise statement about how to cope with stress, at present, defining an “Optimal” response is not possible. This may reflect the difficulty in defining a stressor, or maybe we need to rethink the nature of stress itself. One researcher, endocrinologist Bruce McEwen, has argued for the concept of “allostasis”, which considers stress within the context of the energy demands of behavior (McEwen, 2005). McEwen has argued that this concept can explain the relationship between “normal” behavior (such as foraging, breeding or migrating) and stressful situations; for example, foraging is not normally stressful, but would cause stress when food is scarce. In addition, he has suggested that allostasis can also shed light on factors such as gender differences in stress. The later point has also been supported by psychologist Shelley Taylor and her colleagues, who suggest that women are more likely than men to engage in nurturing and socializing as ways of coping with stressors (Taylor, Klein & Lewis, 2000). Given the variations in the way individuals respond, the most reasonable advice that can be given in terms of coping with stress is that we should:

- Acknowledge how our perceptions influence our reactions;
- Recognize when we are stressed; and
- Develop a range of possible coping responses.

In defensive coping, we attempt to defend ourselves against the situation rather than dealing with it directly. And sometimes we try to prevent it by means of drugs and alcohol.

Psychologists call the indirect method defense mechanism. Defense mechanism has been regarded as unconscious psychological processes, mental or symbolic that people develop to take away anxiety, a means of wading off anxiety and other negative feelings. According to Maisamari (2002) most psychologists today see defense as psychological maneuvers for coping with both internal and external stressors that threaten the individual’s well-being. Denial is a reality coping-distorting defense because it blocks the ability to perceive. An example is a student who is withdrawn from school but he/she keeps making plans for National Youth Service. In intellectualization, perception is not distorted but the environment around that accompanied stress is blocked for conscious awareness. Although defense mechanisms can alleviate stress that does not mean that they are ultimately beneficial to the person. They change the person not the situation. In fact, it is often regarded by some psychologists as physical disturbance and they are not beneficial when they interfere with coping methods. It should be used as a last resort. Phinney and Haas (2003) came up with other coping behaviours.

According to him, they range from dangerous through anti-social, strange to normal. Among the dangerous coping behaviours are drinking, smoking, over eating, use of drugs and hyperactivity. Denial is one of the major protective psychological mechanisms that enable people with the flood of feelings that occur in a stressful situation (Kalish, 2003). Believing that you will be going to National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) when you know you are not doing well can only help to avoid the shocking and destructive impact by postponing the time when one has to deal with stress. Nonetheless, in some cases, a strategy of defensive pessimism may work best in handling stress, that is, imagining negative outcomes, the individual may be able to prepare for forthcoming stressful circumstances (Showers & Cantor, 2000; Norem & Cantor, 2001). This means that positive as well as negative thinking are involved with coping with stress. According to Davidson, Smith and Levine (2009) physical exercise is a highly effective technique for reducing stress. Unlike the use of sedative drugs, exercise is an active approach to

copied with psychological reactions to stress. Brisk walking, tennis, basketball, jogging, swimming, volleyball and other such exercises are examples of useful exercises under stressful situations (Phinney & Haas, 2003).

Because stress takes a toll on people's physical and psychological well-being, much effort has gone into developing methods for reducing stress. Psychologists suggest that an individual can reduce stress by modifying any of its major components. Thus an individual can change the situation that constitutes the stressor, modify cognitive appraisals that trigger the rest of the stress response, or learn ways to control the physiological arousal. Finally, one can adopt more effective behaviors for meeting the demands of the situation. Another approach to changing cognitions does not involve attacking irrational ideas that cause disturbance. In self-instructional training, people learn to talk to themselves and guide their behavior in ways that help them cope more effectively (Pearlin, 2003). They prepare different self-instructions to use at four critical stages of the stressful episode: preparing for the stressor, confronting the stressor, dealing with the feeling of being overwhelmed and appraising coping efforts after the stressful situation. Many people cope with stress by seeking support from other people. In their own opinion, Connidis and Davies (2005) family, friends, social as well as religious groups can provide emotional reassurance, boost self – esteem and express their caring concern. They went further to say that companions and confidants can enhance emotional and physical wellbeing. However, Coyne (2006) said that the above stance ignores the fact that all relationships have costs.

They maintained that even good relationships can sometimes be a source of stress. Women who had good relationships were likely to experience stress. Because of their traditional responsibilities for taking care of others, women incur higher costs of caring than men, indeed, according to Helgeson (2012) excessive attention to either one's well-being or that of others increases health risks. They concluded by saying that a balance perspective is healthier.

Furthermore, some research suggests that people who discuss their traumatic experiences with others may actually improve the functioning of their immune system (Penebaker, 2000). For instance, Penebaker asked healthy undergraduates to write about either superficial topics (control group) or traumatic experiences (experimental group) during brief daily sessions. Measures of immune system showed that lymphocytes were more responsible in those students who had discussed their traumatic experiences. The experimental group also showed a drop in the number of visits to the health center relative to the control group. In their own observation, Kaplan and Tashima (2001) said that social support takes three major forms each of which he said, performs a crucial function. One form consists of giving the individual and practice problem-solving guidance in dealing with stressful life events. This is important because stress reduces one's cognitive efficiency.

A second form of social support consists of giving care, affection and nurturance. This form helps to maintain self-esteem and booster confidence. Thirdly, Kaplan maintains that social supports can provide encouragement and re-assurance. This is the encouragement that one is able to master the stressful situation and re-assurance that one's life will return to normal. The importance of social support in moderating the impact of stressful life event is

considerable. On intellectual level, having someone to talk to give us a sounding bond, a second opinion advice, information we struggle for solution to our problems (Clark, 2005).

Again, Kemeny (2004) noted that if someone experiencing stress in his work has a supportive environment, the effect of stress can be greatly reduced. Rook (2003) on the other hand, said that social contacts are more important in stressful relationship. Those who have them are more distressed. He maintained that most relationships are neither all good nor all bad, but have both good aspects and bad ones. Nathan (2002) seemed to support this when he said that college students who lack control over their social contacts in an impoverished overcrowded living conditions are more stressed than those living in less crowded circumstances. They also have less social support due to social withdrawal (Lepore, 2002). In a study of college students, perceived support from a friend reduced psychological distress when there was conflict with a roommate. Similarly, perceived support from a roommate reduced psychological distress when there was own conflict with a friend (Lepore, 2002). Like multiple positive identities and satisfying social roles, multiple sources of social support promote well-being. In his own opinion, Aldwin (2007) said that although the presence of a friend can increase reactivity under embarrassing conditions Kamarck, Manuck and Jennings (2000) stressed that having a friend nearby usually reduces reactivity to stress.

People vary enormously in their ability to cope with stressors, and some of that variation is due to personal resources that contribute to resilience, the extent to which people are flexible and respond adaptively to external or internal demands. A person who is resilient is said to be less vulnerable to stressors (Santrock, 2001). Factors that influence coping include personal resources and a sense of control. Personal resources include a variety of factors, ranging from money to good health. Money and other material resources can be an important factor in dealing with both daily hassles and with life events. Social skills and knowledge are also personal resources that affect coping. People who are socially skilled are better at getting along with others and are at ease in social situations. These individuals are less likely to feel stressed by having to attend a social gathering or make a speech than individuals who are less socially skilled. Knowledge is an important resource, and people who know about automobile transmissions may not need the money that someone with less knowledge requires to get the transmission fixed. Being healthy is an obvious advantage in coping with stressors; healthy people have more energy and are able to endure the physical demands imposed by the stress response.

A sense of being in control is also important in resilience and coping. People who believe that they can control important factors in their lives have an internal (rather than an external) locus of control. People who have an internal locus of control have advantages over those who have an external locus of control, and coping with stress is one of those advantages. People who believe that they can exert control over important events and conditions in their lives are at advantage, even if the things they control are minor and even if the control is only an illusion and not real. Feeling in control is a positive state of mind that leads to optimism, which has a positive relation to health. Even more interesting, the feeling of being in control does not have to be reality based to be effective; even the illusion of control can exert a positive effect on mental and physical health (Anene, 2001).

When people feel in control of their health and factors that relate to their health, they adopt healthier behaviors, maintain better social relationships, and possibly have healthier immune systems. The personal belief in control, even if it is not entirely reality based, is healthy when this belief prompts to behave in health-promoting ways (Pearlin, 2003).

One effective way of dealing with stress is to remove or to reduce the source of stress from our lives. If an employee holds a job that is stressful, discussions could be held with the employer that might lead to a reduction in the pressure of the job, or the employee could resign. If the stress stems from an unhappy marriage, either marriage counseling could be sought or the 47 marriage could be ended. In a variety of ways, effective coping with stress can take the form of reducing it. For example, Taylor (2000) randomly assigned college students to two groups at the beginning of the term. One group was asked to imagine themselves beaming with success when they received high marks in the class. The second group was asked to think of practical steps they could take to avoid failure and get a good grade (getting the book, reading assignments, studying in advance, and so on). They actually studied more and received higher grades, and as a result of reducing the stressful threat of failure, felt less anxious. Our cognitions are intimately linked to our reactions to stressful events and a number of effective methods of coping involve cognitive strategies. Three effective cognitive coping strategies involve changing how we think about the stressful event, focusing attention away from stressful events that cannot be changed, and religious coping. Reappraisal can be an effective method of coping.

This refers to changing how we think about or interpret the stressful events that push and shove our lives. For example, I know a musician who had a successful first record, but his second album was a flop the critics panned it and the public didn't buy it. At first, he saw this as a sign that the first record was a fluke and that he had no real talent. As a result, the failure of the second album was a huge stress. However, a veteran musician convinced him that having an unsuccessful second album is a common "sophomore slump" among musicians who go on to be very successful. This conversation changed his interpretation of his unsuccessful album and allowed him to view it as a challenge to do better next time. Finding an interpretation that is realistic and constructive minimizes the stressfulness of negative events (Van Praag, 2004.) In some cases, stressful events cannot be changed and reappraising their meaning is of limited help. For example, losing a spouse to death must be coped with in some other way. Focusing attention away from the death and moving on with life is associated with less depression and better physical health (Masten, 2007). Many individuals cope effectively by interpreting events in terms of their religious beliefs (Sun, 2005). For example, a study of Latinos with arthritis found that individuals who viewed their painful condition as being *en las manos de Dios* (in God's hands) experienced greater psychological well-being than did individuals who engaged in less religious coping. When the source of stress cannot realistically be removed or changed, another effective option is to manage our psychological and physiological reactions to the stress. For example, an individual may decide to start a new business, knowing full well that the first year or two will be hectic. She would be unwilling, then to remove the source of the stress (the new business) but could learn to control her reactions to the stress.

One strategy might be to schedule as much time as possible for relaxing activities, such as aerobic exercise, hobbies, or time with friends. Another would be to seek special training

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from a psychologist in controlling the body reactions to stress by learning to deeply relax the large body muscles (relaxation training). Happily, psychological counseling that encourages all three methods of effective coping has even been successful in changing the Type A behavior pattern. Indeed, treated patients showed a 50% reduction in heart attacks and deaths compared with Type A individuals who did not receive treatment (Sun, 2005).

Lazarus (2007) has classified all the coping strategies that a person might use into five general categories:

- Direct action response – the individual tries directly to change or manipulate his/her relationship to the stressful situation, such as escaping from/removing it.
- Information seeking – the individual tries to understand the situation better, and to predict future events that are related to the stressor.
- Inhibition of action – doing nothing; this may be the best course of action if the situation is seen as short term.
- Intrapsychic or palliative coping – the individual reappraises the situation (for example through the use of psychological defense mechanisms) or changes the „internal environment (through drugs, alcohol, relaxation or mediation). Turning to others for help and emotional support.

Sometimes the term „coping response“ or mechanism is used in contrast to defence mechanism; the ego defence mechanisms involve some degree of distortion of reality and self-deception. While desirable in the short term, as long-term solutions to stress they are unhealthy and undesirable. Coping mechanisms, by contrast, are conscious attempt to adapt to stress and anxiety in a positive and constructive way. They are thought and behaviors to search for information, problem solving, seeking help from others, recognizing our true feelings and establishing goals and objectives. In effect, coping improves fit (between the individual and the environment), whereas defence maintains misfit while reducing perceived stress (Steptoe, 2001). Much of what have been said about coping with stress refers to what people do in a largely spontaneous way. In this informal sense we all manage our stress more or less effectively. But, more formally, stress management refers to a range of psychological techniques used in a quite deliberate way, in a professional setting to help people reduce their stress. These techniques may be used singly or in combinations.

Other scholars have tended to categorize coping into two main areas; problem-focused category; and, emotion-focused category. The problem-focused category of coping looks to managing the source of the stressor while the emotional-focused category looks to regulating the thoughts and feeling of the individual without specifically addressing the problem (Brown *et al.*, 2005; Litman 2006). Within the context of problem-focused strategies, examples include, problem-solving, planning and effort (Holt, Hoar & Fraser, 2005); emotional strategies focus more towards avoidance, detachment and suppression (Kashden *et al.*, 2011).

Scholars have seen coping as a stabilizing factor that may assist an individual in psychosocial adaptation during stressful events (Bamuhair *et al.*, 2015). To this end, coping methods often used by students, to reduce level of stress include, effective-time management, social support, positive reappraisal, and engagement in leisurely pursuits. There is also emotion-based coping that involves accepting responsibility and self-blame, and this type of coping is more useful in the first year of entering the higher institution (in this case, University of Benin),

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while in later years the trend shifted towards confronting, cognitive, and planned problem-solving as it has also been found that students with engagement strategy of coping are able to modify situations, resulting in a more adaptive outcome, and also have reported fewer symptoms of depression (Bamuhair *et al*, 2015). The contention above is of intellectual quality as it shows the way and manner students experience stress that affect their academic performance from the point of entering the higher institution up to the latter years and how they are able to develop coping mechanisms in the process.

In connection to adapting, the techniques utilized and saw dimensions of confidence have been appeared to have an effect upon individual prosperity (Lane *et al*, 2002). Confidence can be characterized as the degree to which "one acknowledges oneself, regards oneself, sees oneself as an individual of worth". Connections have likewise been set up between confidence and performance. In particular, low dimensions of confidence have been related with decrements to performance and inspiration bringing about an inclination to diminish commitment with issue centered techniques, which possibly impacts contrarily on confidence (Ader *et al*, 2000). Subsequently, except if support is looked for a descending winding of confidence, performance and inspiration may result.

Adapting strategies regularly utilized by students, to lessen dimension of stress incorporate, powerful time the board, social help, positive reappraisal, and commitment in comfortable interests. There is additionally feeling based adapting that includes tolerating duty and self-fault, and this kind of adapting is progressively valuable in the principal year of the therapeutic school, while in later years the pattern moved towards going up against, psychological, and arranged critical thinking (Samira S. Bamuhair *et al* (2015). It has additionally been discovered that students with commitment system of adapting can alter circumstances, bringing about an increasingly versatile result, and furthermore have detailed less indications of despondency (Samira S. Bamuhair *et al* (2015).

Theoretically, over the years, several theories have been developed to explain away man's interaction with the society, the state and its institutions. This relationship between man and societal institutions is trans-generational and this has caught the attention of scholars especially as it relates to the effect of stress on students' academic performance in tertiary institutions. In light of the above, Crises Intervention Theory as well as the Cognitive Theory of Stress could be useful. On its part, Ulric (Dick) Neisser (1980), Masten (2007), Zautra (2003) and other cognitive theorists maintain that the most powerful means of regulating feelings is by controlling how we think about stressful situations and about ourselves. Resick (2005) suggests that a relatively small number of irrational core beliefs lie at the root of most maladaptive negative feelings. for example, we tell ourselves that we must achieve and be approved of in virtually every respect if we are to consider ourselves worthwhile people; that it is terrible, awful and catastrophic when life or other people are not the way that we demand they be; that people who do not behave as we wish are bad and therefore deserving of punishment. In Resick's terms, these "catastrophizing" tendencies, together with other irrational ideas, generate unnecessary anxiety, despair and anger.

When people use the technique of cognitive restructuring to systematically detect, challenge and replace these irrational ideas, their feelings can change dramatically, in as the following case: whenever I find myself getting guilty or upset, I immediately tell myself that

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there must be some silly sentence that I am saying to myself to cause this upset. People learn to talk to themselves and guide their behaviour in ways that help them cope more effectively (Greenberg, 2005). They prepare different self-instructions to use at four critical stages of the stressful episodes: preparing for the stressor, confronting the stressor, dealing with the feeling of being overwhelmed and appraising coping efforts after the stressful situation. Crisis Intervention Theory, on the other hand adumbrates the origins of crises theory are usually attributed to Lindermann's classic study of grief reactions. LINDERMAN'S (1944) establish the basis framework for defining symptomatology of crisis. Crisis intervention is defined as the educated skillfully arranged application regarding systems got from the set up standard of emergency theory by experts like social specialists, guardians, wellbeing laborers and so on to comprehend these standards with the goal of helping people, families or gatherings to adapt to or alter individual or gathering qualities, for example, emotions, frames of mind and behaviours that are made a decision to be mala-versatile or mala-adjustive occasioned by outcomes/possibility or formative changes (Ewing, 1987 referred to by Ugiagbe, 2018). So also, Hafer and Peterson (1982) in Poal (1992) characterized emergency mediation as the sort of mental medical aid that empowers experts to support an individual or gathering encountering a fleeting loss of capacity to adapt to an issue or circumstance, and the fundamental points of emergency intercession are endeavor to cure unsavory circumstance and serve neglected treatment needs of people or gathering experiencing injury (referred to by Ugiagbe, 2018).

Emergency intercession way to deal with individual issues and social change are reflected in a staggered idea of social work exercises – direct assistance for people, families and gatherings, social, instructive and relaxation/social exercises inside the network, the improvement of a foundation of wellbeing, guiding, social and social administrations, socio-political changes on the nearby, state and national dimension; and commitment for harmony exercises on the global dimension and so forth (Bormann, 2005 referred to by Ugiagbe, 2018). Emergency intercession theory frequently advises social laborers with regards to the kinds of strategies they should use with customers in certain emergency circumstances (Ugiagbe, 2018). Emergency intercession theory help social specialist in understanding different circumstances, challenges, practices and encounters, and sense the social laborers in what to do because of the distinguished wonder /traumatic situations aforementioned (Ugiagbe, 2018).

According to crisis intervention theory, a social worker should take note of these symptoms and the phases of the traumatic experience of the individual, before and during the interventions (Ugiagbe, 2018). In essence, this theory states that social worker should note the severity of the hazardous events that start the chance of reaction which lead to the crisis because some are sudden, unexpected events while others may be a developmental stage (Ugiagbe, 2018). The very first obligation a social worker has for a client in crisis or going through traumatic situation is to help restore the normal functioning of the individual or group (Ugiagbe, 2018). One feasible way of doing this is building on the strength (positive) traits of the individual (Ugiagbe, 2018). Professional social workers are trained to view their client as human beings using their strength and resources to cope with adversity as best they can have a much better chance of helping those clients find the means to improve their situations (Goldstein, 1990 cited in Ugiagbe, 2018: 119).

Caplan (1974) noted that the process of a person going through is when he or she faces a problem for which he or she appears not to have an immediate solution and that is for a time insurmountable through the utilization of usual or normal methods of problem-solving in the past (cited by Ugiagbe, 2018:114). In other words, it is a period which the individual experience upset and tension which manifests when the person makes futile attempts at the solution of the problem (Ugiagbe, 2018:114). With time, the individual develops some kind of adaptation and equilibrium is achieved which may bare the person in a better or worse condition than prior to the crisis (Ugiagbe, 2018:114). This mean that the essential assignment determines the occurrence of a crisis is an imbalance between the perceived difficulty and importance of the threatening situation and the resources immediately available to deal with it hence the crisis refers to the person's emotional reaction not to the threatening situation itself (Ugiagbe, 2018:114). This situation has to do with the physic balance or homeo-static balance within and without the individual and attempt by the individual to restore balance usually entails some forms of engagement in problem-solving activity designed to restore the physic balance (Ugiagbe, 2018:114).

From the above, obviously the emergency intercession theory is additionally valuable in breaking down this exploration venture dependent on its skillfully arranged utilization of procedures got from the built up standard of emergency theory by experts like social laborers, parental figures, wellbeing specialists and so on to comprehend these standards with the goal of helping individual students and students' groups to cope with stress that impact on their performance (see Ewing, 1987; Ugiagbe, 2018). The first-aid credentials of crisis intervention enables social workers to help students experiencing poor performance crisis develop coping mechanisms that will enhance their performance.

Summary, Conclusion and Recommendations

Firstly, there are different kinds of stress in Nigeria--including financial challenges, epileptic power supply or constant power outage, pressure from lecturers, time-table adjustment by school management among others. The research findings are in agreement with the study conducted by Peterson and Seligman (2003) who highlighted various types of stress include; acute stress results from the sudden onset of demands and is experienced as tension, headaches, emotional upsets, gastrointestinal disturbances, feeling of agitation, and pressure. Episodic acute stress can lead to migraines, hypertension, stroke, anxiety, depression, or serious gastrointestinal distress and traumatic.

Secondly, it was also revealed that there are causes of stress among University of Benin students which include family issues, much work load, crowded class rooms, power supply in the university, lack of finance and industrial actions by different unions among others. This finding is line with the findings of Santrock (2001) who stated different causes of stress and inability to cope and function well. The negative social related causes are divorce, conflicts, violence, crimes, assaults, victimization, hostility, deprivations, and failure in our personal, family or social commitments, financial problems and unemployment. Balarabe (2003) states that causes of stress among students have to do with lack of adequate feeding, clothing, accommodation and utilities like water, electricity, waste disposal, transportation, physical health, recreation and relaxation. He further states that strained relationship with students,

lecturers and other significant people in the life of the students causes stress. Lazarus (2000) expresses the view that conditions place the organism under strain, the homeostatic mechanism no longer operate smoothly and that if the stresses continue, the organism may suffer injury as a consequence of its own efforts to meet the stress. In his opinion, the agents and events that can place the organism under stress include infections, nervous strain, physical injury, excessive heat or cold and muscular fatigue.

Thirdly, there are effects of stress on academic performance among students in University of Benin, Benin City, Edo state. This implies that there negative effect of stress on academic performance among students in University of Benin. This is alignment with the study conducted by Kiel (2004) that stress makes an individual to be constantly tensed, worried and can edge such that he or she is in panic, fear, and feels threatened. Lastly, there are coping mechanisms available to students facing stress in the University of Benin. Maimasari (2002) opined that the most vital requirements for coping with stress are awareness, acceptance, responsibility and coping skills. A third class of coping strategies involves seeking social support that is, turning to others for assistance and emotional support in times of stress. Thus, the student might seek the help of a class-mate in preparing for the test, and the man with the terminal illness might choose to join a support group for the terminally ill. Social support is one of the most important environmental resources.

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