
ACADEMIC STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES AMONG STUDENT NURSES IN COLLEGES OF NURSING SCIENCES IN ANAMBRA STATE, NIGERIA

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Abstract

This is a cross sectional study that explored the academic stress and coping strategies among the student nurses in Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State, Nigeria. A total of 366 respondents were proportionately drawn from a total of 1,894 students through Taro Yamene formula for sample size calculation. A validated questionnaire that was tested for internal consistency was used for data collection. Ethical approval (NAUTH/CS/66/VOL.16/VER.3/58/2024/04) was obtained from the REC, NAUTH, Nnewi. Data collected were analyzed through descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS IBM Version 25. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between Colleges of Nursing student coping strategies. Independent sample t-test was also used to examine differences between the students' training institutions and their sources of academic stress, and also between institutional training of the student and stress coping strategies of nursing students. Multiple regression was employed to analyze the association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies with value of $P < 0.05$ considered to be statistically significant. Study revealed that a good number of the student nurses (52.7%) in Colleges of Nursing Sciences in Anambra State experience academic stress of which 78.0% saw the amount of class work materials to be learned as a source of stress and a greater number (67.5%) were of the opinion that financial problem causes stress to them. Coping strategies applied by student nurses include: seeking professional support from senior nurses, listening to music or watching movies, family moral support, and others. Positive correlation was found between the students' training institution and their source of stress. Study showed that there is an association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies and there is no association between type of training institution and stress coping strategies among the students.

Key words: *academic stress. coping strategies, student nurses, Colleges of Nursing*

INTRODUCTION

There are diverse types of stressors and consequences experienced by student nurses and their ability to cope with stress is essential for them to succeed. In the opinion of Gibson et al, (2007) cited in Ajibade et al, (2016), students undergoing training in Nursing schools seem to possess a substantially higher level of potential for encountering pressure and challenges compared to other college students. Stress maybe be seen as a common element in life regardless of race or cultural background but the emotional and physical means people respond to it may lead to mental and physical symptoms. The effects of stress sometimes vary depending on how it is appraised, and the coping strategies used. In the opinion of AL-Ayadhi, (2005) cited in Mahfouz and Alsahli, (2016), coping strategies to stress differ between individuals and are influenced by ethnic, cultural and socioeconomic

characteristics of the persons involved.

It has been found that one in five nurses want to quit their job and 40% nurses experience considerable burnout due to academic and workplace stress (Yasmin et al., 2018). In nursing training, students experience increased tension prior to their clinical experiences and written examination especially their finals. Studies confirmed that one third of student nurses experience stress severe enough to induce mental health problem such as depression and anxiety (Screevany, 2015).

Students may have difficulty in adjusting to more rigorous academic expectations, separation from home for the first time and the varied structure of academic experience at the college level (Pascoe, et al., 2019). Going further, Pascoe et al., (2019), stated that the common stressors among students include; academic workload, time pressure, decision-making, continuous changes, and economic mistakes which tend to negatively impact on them physically, psychologically, academically, and socially. Worry about successes, academic workload, availability of time, family problems, and engagement in patients' care were viewed by Mohammed and Ahmed (2021), to be among the factors that cause stress among higher school students. Other factors may include assignment submission, excess homework, assessment deadlines, unclear assignments, uncomfortable classrooms and relations with faculty members.

Stress can be self-imposed as seen in setting too high standard or having unrealistic expectations regarding one's ability, situational such as seen in time constraints, lack of resources, threats to emotional or physical well-being (Iyi, 2015). Stress could be connected with life changes, personal or work related and the inability to adapt successfully may result in illness.

Generally, what may be distressful to one person may be excitingly challenging (positive stressful) to another and the same event can be distressful at one time and stimulating or non-stressful at another (Anand & Nemera, 2015). For an event to cause distress may sometimes depend on individual's perception of the situation.

These notwithstanding, when stress gets out of control, it becomes challenging and may affect the individual's health, one's relationship with others and and distort life process (Iyi, 2015). The stressful challenges encountered may include insecurity about clinical competence, fear of failure and interpersonal relations with patients, the pressure resulting from the fear of expulsion from the training, time pressure, and lack of motivation, poor social life, interacting with dying patients and interpersonal conflicts with other nurses. Some of these may positively or negatively affect the student.

Chapman, et al. (2020), stated that stress could result into exhaustion, depersonalisation and decreased personal achievements. Stressful events could make student nurses experience deterioration in academic performance which may result to elimination from the nursing program and shortage of nurses in clinical career (Moustaka & Constantinidis, 2019). Furthermore, studies have shown that one third of student nurses experience severe stress that might induce mental health problems such as depression and anxiety (Chernomas & Shapiro, 2013; Zeng, et al. 2019). A study by Parveen and Inayat, (2017), showed that about 70% of students participants have positive view that academic, clinical and environmental factors cause among nursing students. In the same vein, Oluwaseun, et al, (2023), in their cross-sectional descriptive study concluded that students' predominant stress sources were academic workload (73.1%) and financial difficulties (55.7%) for which self-distraction and instrumental support were used as coping strategies. Khajehei and Kashefi (2016), found out

that palpitation, fatigue, decreased energy, unusual behaviour and inability to concentrate were common resultants of stress among students.

The above notwithstanding, students cannot avoid stress but their ability to cope with these stressors is important in achieving success in the academic performance. So managing stress effectively and seeking coping strategy in an appropriate way is very important for preventing the negative effects of stress. Since student nurses experience diverse types of stresses with possible negative consequences, the ability to cope with stress is essential for them to succeed and the need to adopt appropriate coping strategy is golden. The stress experienced by students can be altered and influenced by the coping strategies they choose to employ. Effective coping strategies help students to perform markedly better in regards to their studies (Khater, Akhuzaheya &Shaban, 2014).

Various coping strategies used by students include ventilation, diversion, relaxation, self-reliance, social peer group support, avoidance, praying, day dreaming listening to music and smoking, drinking, joking and others (Regehr, Glancy& Pitts, 2013). Stress management studies have shown that students can do little on their own to significantly reduce stress which they experience or to which they are exposed therefore, they should be guided on how to adapt and prioritize their own care among the other demands required of the profession (Jarrad,et al. 2018).

MacArthur,(2014) cited by Ajibade et al, (2016), further categorized coping strategies into active and avoidant. In his opinion, “active coping strategies” are either behavioral or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressors itself or how one thinks about it, whereas “avoidant coping strategies” lead people into activities such as alcohol use, or mental states such as withdrawal that keep them from directly addressing stressful events. Semel Institute for Neuroscience and Human Behaviour (2023) stated that coping mechanisms can be either active or avoidant. Sheu, etal(2013), identified other strategies such as: Staying optimistic, application of transference, identifying triggers and warning signs, establishing routines, spending time with people who care and look after one’s health through eating healthy food, getting regular exercise and listening to music, walking or dancing as means of managing stress.

In the opinion of Regehr, Glancy& Pitts, (2013), stress management could also be behavioral or psycho-social with the outcome aimed at tolerating, reducing or minimize stressful events. In some instances, it could be problem solving or emotional focused coping strategies (Al-Gamal, Alhosain&Alusunaye, 2018).

Generally, active coping strategies, whether behavioral or emotional, are thought to be better ways to deal with stressful events, while avoidant coping strategies appear to be a psychological risk factor or marker for adverse responses to stressful life event.

When coping with stress is successful, adaptation takes place and promotes health, psychological well-being and social functioning (Soares & Oliveira, 2013 in Ajibade, et al, (2016). Adopting appropriate management strategies is very important for counteracting the negative effects of stress among students.

In the course of academic activities and interaction with students the researchers observed some unhealthy behaviours among students such as irritable actions, withdrawal from friends and academic activities. Further probe into the situation revealed to some extent that some of them are not finding it easy with the stress they are passing through in their schools. These prompted the researchers to ask some questions relating to the origin of stress among the students, any coping strategies applied by the students and how effective these coping

strategies have been in managing their stress.

This study is therefore set to determine stress and stress coping strategies among student nurses in Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State, Nigeria.

Objective of the Study were to:

1. Identify sources of academic stress among student nurses in Colleges of nursing in Anambra State
2. Determine the coping strategies applied by student nurses in Colleges of Nursing Sciences in Anambra State in the management of academic stress.

The researchers hypothesized that:

1. There will be no significant association between student nurses' training institution in Anambra State Nigeria and their source of stress.
2. Training institution of the student nurses in Anambra State Nigeria will not play any significant role in their stress coping strategies.
3. There will be no association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopted a cross sectional design to explore the academic stress, and coping strategies among the student nurses in Anambra State. Brotobor, et al., (2021) adopted the same design in their assessment of stress and stress management strategies adopted by students of the Department of Nursing Sciences, Ambrose Alli University, Ekpoma, Nigeria.

Area of Study

The study was conducted in Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State, South-Eastern Nigeria. Anambra State is an industrial and commercial state in Nigeria with nine Colleges of Nursing located in different senatorial zones of the state. These training institutions were accredited by the Nursing and Midwifery Council of Nigeria (NMCN) for the training of student nurses. Ownership of the colleges differ. Some are owned by the government while some are owned by the missions/churches. Irrespective of the ownership, each college has required structures and human capacity to train nurses as required by the regulatory body for the training of nurses in Nigeria.

Population of Study

Population for the study comprised of 1,894 students enrolled in the Colleges of Nursing Sciences in Anambra State at the time of this study. These students were in their different academic levels.

Sample and Sampling Technique

Cluster sampling technique was used to select the institutions. This was done based on the ownership of the colleges (Federal, State and Private/Mission).

One Federal College of Nursing, one State College of Nursing and two Privates/mission Colleges were randomly selected to participate in the study.

A total of 366 sample was proportionately drawn for the study through Taro Yamene formula for sample size selection.

Respondents for the study were proportionately selected to ensure proper representation of the population for each training institution.

Instrument for Data Collection

The instrument for data collection was modified questionnaire adopted from standardized perceived stress scale and coping behavior inventory gotten from previous studies. The instrument was validated by experts and tested for internal consistency through Spearman Brown correlation coefficient which yielded a reliability index of 0.90.

Ethical Consideration

The following ethical consideration were ensured by the researcher during the course of the study.

Ethical approval with reference number NAUTH/CS/66/VOL.16/VER.3/58/2024/04 was obtained from Nnamdi Azikwe University Teaching Hospital Human Research Committee, before data collection commenced. Formal permission was also obtained from the provost of the selected Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State before commencement of the study.

Anonymity of the respondents as well as confidentiality of information from them. Voluntary participation was ensured as respondents were not not pressurized to participate in the study and respect for human dignity was equally ensured in the course of data collection.

Procedure for Data Collection

The REC and individual institutional approvals were used to gain access to the respondents who also accepted to participate in the study. After interaction with the respondents during which the purpose and objectives of the study were explained to the respondents. Clarifications were made were necessary before they responded to the instrument. The face to administration of the instrument lasted for three months

Method of Data Analysis

The data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics using SPSS IBM Version 25. Pearson's Product Moment Correlation was used to test the relationship between Colleges of Nursing student coping strategies. Independent sample t-test was also used to examine difference between the student training institution and their source of academic stress and also between institutional training of the student and stress coping strategies of nursing students. Multiple regression was employed to analyze the association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies with value of $P < 0.05$ considered to be statistically significant.

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RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-demographic variables of the respondents (n = 366)

Item	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age		
16 – 20 years	32	8.7
21 – 26 years	286	78.1
27 – 31 years	27	7.4
32 – 36 years	11	3.0
37 – 40 years	6	1.6
40 years and above	4	1.1
Religion		
Christianity	338	92.4
Muslim	16	4.4
Traditional	12	3.3
Others	0	0.0
Level of study		
Year 1	152	41.5
Year 2	118	32.2
Year 3	96	26.2
Sex		
Female	319	87.2
Male	47	12.8
Marital Status		
Single	345	94.3
Married	19	5.2
Other	3	0.8
Type of training institution		
Federal	87	23.7
State	84	22.9
Private/mission	195	53.3

Table 1 shows that the mean age of the respondents is 21.4 years with SD of 0.77. Majority of the respondents 152(41.5%) are in year one.

Majority of the respondents 345 (94.3%) were females and 195(53.3%) belong to Private/Mission Colleges of Nursing.

Table 2: Sources of academic stress among the students (n = 366)

Item	S/Agree (%)	Agree (%)	Disagree (%)	S/disagree(%)
Maintain balance between study and leisure time	132(37.4)	193(52.7)	30(8.3)	5(1.4)
The amount of class work materials to be learned	281(78.0)	63(17.5)	13(3.6)	9(2.5)
Less vacations/break	243(67.5)	93(25.8)	23(6.4)	7(1.9)
Thought of examination	173(48.1)	89(24.7)	52(14.4)	46(12.8)
Fear of failing a course	183(50.8)	119(33.1)	40(11.1)	24(6.7)
Fear of making mistake during clinical experience	21(5.8)	198(55.0)	113(31.3)	18(5.0)
Financial problems	243(67.5)	60(16.7)	47(13.1)	16(4.4)
Poor inter-personal relation with the teachers	113(31.4)	198(55.0)	23(6.3)	16(4.4)
Family problem	243(67.5)	93(25.4)	23(6.2)	7(1.9)

Table 2 shows the sources of stress commonly experienced by the student nurses. From the table, 193(52.7%) of the respondents agreed that maintaining balance between study and leisure time is stressful to them while 132 (37.4 %) of the respondents strongly agreed to this. The table further reveals that 281 (78.0%) of the respondents strongly agreed the amount of class work materials to be learned are among the stressors commonly experienced by student. Less vacation or break in Colleges of nursing was identified by majority 243(67.5%) as stressors. The table further reveals that 173 (47.2%) of the respondents believed that the thought of examination constitute stress commonly experienced by student nurses. Fear failing a course is a common stress experienced by student nurses as revealed in the table where 183(50.8%) of the respondents strongly agreed to this. The fear of making mistake during clinical experience was agreed by 198 (55.0%) of the respondents to be a commonly experienced stress among student nurses. Financial problem was seen by the majority of the respondents 243(67.5%) with strong agreement as a stress commonly experienced by student nurses. The table further shows that 243 (67.5%) of the respondents strongly agreed that family problem is stress commonly experience by student nurses.

Table 3: Stress coping strategies applied by student nurses against academic stress (n = 366)

Item	Always (%)	Sometimes (%)	Rarely (%)	Never(%)
Look forward to the benefit of practicing as a nurse	98(26.8)	189(52.5)	56(15.3)	23(6.3)
Engage in diversion therapies	152(41.5)	104(28.4)	91(24.9)	19(5.2)
Outline a plan on how to address the situation	74(20.2)	225(61.4)	48(13.3)	19(5.2)
Seeking a professional support from senior colleagues	186(50.8)	98(26.8)	53(14.5)	29(7.9)
listening to music and watch movie	154(42.1)	99(27.5)	67(18.3)	46(12.8)
Received moral support from family	205(56.0)	84(22.9)	62(16.9)	15(4.1)

Coping strategies used by student nurses in coping with academic stress and the frequency of usages of the strategies, the table 3 shows that 189(52.5%) of the respondents said they sometime looking forward to the benefit of practicing as a professional nurse helps them to cope with stress.

A good number of the respondents 152(41.5%) always engage in diversion therapies as a coping strategy. Table also shows that 225(61.4%) of the respondents outline a plan on how to address the situation as means of coping with academic stress. Seeking support from senior colleagues is preferred as coping strategy by 186 (50.8%) of the respondents.

Listening to music and watching movies are used as coping strategies applied by 154 (42.1%) of the respondents even as 205(56.0%) of the respondents said they always receive moral support from family as a coping strategy.

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Table 4: Karl Pearson Product Moment Correlation analysis result of the relationship between the student training institution and their source of stress.

		Source of stress	Training institution
Source of stress	Pearson	1	.906**
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	Sum of Squares	528.776	285.565
	and Cross-products		
	Covariance	1.560	.842
	N	366	366
Training institution	Pearson	.906**	1
	Correlation		
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	Sum of Squares	285.565	187.797
	and Cross-products		
	Covariance	.842	.554
	N	366	366

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

The analysis showed a correlation coefficient of 0.906 indicating the existence of strong positive relationship between the student training institution and their source of stress. The test was significant at 0.01 significant level, and led to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that there will be no significant association between the student training institution and their source of stress.

Table 5: Karl Pearson Product Moment correlation result of relationship between type of training institutional of the student and stress coping strategies of nursing students

	Institutional training	Coping strategies
Institutional training	Pearson Correlation	1
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.948**
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	250.578
	Covariance	1.400
	N	366
	Pearson Correlation	.948**
Coping strategies	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000
	Sum of Squares and Cross-products	244.844
	Covariance	1.368
	N	366
	Pearson Correlation	.948**
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000

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

Table 5 shows a correlation coefficient of 0.948 indicating the existence of strong positive relationship between the Training institutional of the student and their stress coping strategies. The test was significant at 0.01 significant level, and led to the rejection of the null hypothesis which states that institutional training of the student nurse will not play a significant role in the stress coping strategies of nursing students in Anambra State.

Table 6: Multiple regression analysis of the association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies

Dependent variable = stress coping strategies

Variable	B	Standard error	B	T	Sig
Constant	2.307	0.396		5.231	.000
Sex	0.312	0.035	0.418	4.081	.000
Age	-0.152	0.89	-0.169	-2.567	0.17
Type of training institution	0.111	0.047	0.121	1.562	.071
Level of study	0.412	0.077	0.334	3.984	.000
R	=	0.396			
R ²	=	0.664			
Adjusted R ²	=	0.139			
Std. Error	=	0.4826			
Calculated F*	=	119.637			
Critical F*	=	3.84			
df ₁	=	3			
df ₂	=	364			
d/w	=	.416			

Significant @ p<0.05

The multiple regression analysis of the association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies revealed a coefficient of determination (R-

square) of 0.644. This means that 64.4 percent of the response rate for stress coping strategies was accounted by the demographic variables of students represented in the model as sex, age, nature of school and level of study. This implies that the response rate acknowledged that stress coping strategies as a function of the variables; sex, age, nature of school and level of study. The value of R of 0.396 indicated the existence of a significant positive relationship between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies.

Breaking down the demographic variables of the student, the regression weight of sex had a standardized value of 0.418, a t value of 5.231 and a sig. level of 0.000 which is less than 0.05 level of significant. Therefore, indicating a significant relationship between sex and stress coping strategies. This shows that the stress coping strategies is significantly associated with the sex of the students indicated that the male sex cope with stress better than their female counterpart.

As regards age of the respondents, the regression weight of age had a standardized value of -0.169, a t value of -2.567 and a sig. level of 0.017 which is less than 0.05 level of significant, therefore, indicating a significant relationship between age and stress coping strategies. The negative weight value shows that the higher the age of the students, the lower their stress coping strategies, indicating that the older students have less stress coping strategy than their young counterpart.

With respect to nature of school, the table disclosed that the regression slope of nature of school had a standardized value of 0.121, a t value of 1.562 and a sig. level of 0.071 which is greater than 0.05 level of significant indicating that there is no significant relationship between type of school and stress coping strategies. The result shows that stress is not associated with the nature of school indicating that all the students faces stress not minding the type of the school involved. Thus, there is no relationship between type of school and stress coping strategies among students.

Lastly, the level of study indicated that the regression weight of level of study had a standardized value of 0.344, a t value of 3.984 and a sig. level of 0.000 which is less the 0.05 level of significant which indicate a significant relationship between level of study and stress coping strategies. This shows that the stress coping strategies is significantly associated with the level of study of the study. Also, The positive weight value shows that the higher the level of study of the students, the higher their stress coping strategies, indicating that the older students have better stress coping strategy than the lower level study who are just experience stress.

DISCUSSION

Sources of academic stress among student Nurses in Anambra state

Findings from the study revealed that a good number of the student nurses(52.7%) in Colleges of Nursing Sciences in Anambra State experience academic stress of which 78.0% saw the amount of class work materials to be learned as a source of stress.

A good number of the students (67.5%) strongly believed that less vacation/break is the source of stress to them. The thought of examination was seen by lesser number of the students (48.1%) as sources of stress while a greater number (67.5%) were of the opinion that financial problem cause stress to them as students.

Poor inter-personal relation with the teachers constitutes sources of stress to about (55.0%) of the student even as 67.5% of them has family problem constituting sources of stress to

them which aligns with Parveen and Inayat, (2017), Oluwaseun, et al, (2023) and Seyedfatemi,et al. (2018).

Coping strategies applied by student nurses in Colleges of Nursing Sciences Anambra state in the management of academic stress

Study revealed that the student nurses in Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State employ some coping strategies in dealing with their academic stress. A good number of the students (52.5%) believe that looking forward to the benefit of practicing as a professional nurses help them to manage their academic stress. Majority of the students (61.4%) outline their plan on how to address stressful as a strategy to manage stress.

Further, a good number of the students (50.8%) always seek professional support from senior nurses as means of managing stress while some others (42.1%) listen to music or watch movies. Finding revealed that 56.0% of the student nurses said that family moral support assists them in managing their academic stressors. These findings are in line with Lucas *et al.* (1993) in Al-Ahmadi, H. (2014). Varied array of strategies employed by the students to manage stress could be based on the assertion that some stress can spur some students to do better in academics.

Association between type of training institution and sources of stress

Positive correlation was found between the students' training institution and their source of stress. It shows that the type of institution and its characteristics like less break and poor interpersonal relationship with the teachers significantly influence students stress level. Existence of positive correlation between the type of training institution and sources of stress may suggest that some training institutions' poor interpersonal between the teachers and the students as well as difficult management policies, may be contributing factors to students' academic stress.

Association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies of nursing students in Anambra state

Finding from study showed that there is an association between the demographic variables of the students and their stress coping strategies. Negative weight value shows that the higher the age of the students, the lower their stress coping strategies, indicating that the older students have less stress coping strategy than their young counterpart as this could be due to their energy and stamina with fewer responsibility outside study than older students. There was no relationship between type of training institution and stress coping strategies among students. Thus, the findings shows that stress is not associated with the nature of school indicating that all students in the Colleges of Nursing in Anambra State face related academic stress irrespective of the type of institution. This could be likened to the use of the same curriculum for the training of the students and possibly relatedness in the policies of the different institutions.

The positive weight value shows that the higher the level of study of the students, the higher their stress coping strategies, indicating that the older students have better stress coping strategy than the lower-level students. This may be related to improved experience as students become more familiar with academic expectations and workload management and matured with age as they develop more coping mechanism

Conclusion

Stress may be a hindering factor towards effective learning but it remains inseparable in health care academic programmes. Effective coping strategies can facilitate adaptation among student nurses with smooth academic progression.

Considering the findings of this study appropriate strategies there is need for well established staff student relationship for better coping among the students.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made by the researchers:

- Studying hours should be regulated to enable student nurses have adequate time to rest and cope better in the course of their study.
- Teachers who are open to communication and can recognize signs of stress in students will make academic stress coping strategies easier for the students.

Conflict of Interest

Authors declare that there was no conflict of interest in the course of this study

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