The Effect of Stress Management Among Part-Time Students

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Abstract:

Purpose: Stress has become a common issue that disturbs a lot of people. It is seen as one of the primary concerns of health psychologists. People sometimes think that stress occurs only under certain circumstances but it is everywhere; in school, job settings, home life, hassles, life change or social readjustment all serve as stressors and have psychological as well as physical reactions.

Design/Methodology/Approach: The research design applied for this study was descriptive research and a simple random sampling method with emphasis on the lottery technique was adopted. The population chosen for the study was two hundred (200) respondents. Fifty (50) students were selected from each level of study and ten (10) students from each of the programmes students' study. The research instruments used were interviews and questionnaires.

Findings: The findings of the study indicated that despite the stressful situations and the effects students-workers experience they find ways of managing the situation effectively if not eliminating it. On the whole, student-workers present some measures of specific stressful situations in studies; their perception of stress as negative in their academic performance, emotional state and health; their variable competence to manage stress in studies and their desire for having a course on stress management.

Practical implications: The research also edges the University authorities to improve the facilities or resources for students to avoid compounding problems on campus.

Originality value: This study focuses on stress perceptions, stressful situations and stress management strategies to be adopted for studies in Part-Time programmes.

Keywords: Health, Stress Management, Programmes, Students, Strategies, Workers.

JEL classification:

Paper type: Research article.

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1.   Introduction

Recently, most individuals have experienced or been experiencing stress. This is as a result of competition and constant changes which require environmental changes leading to stress on workers who are Part-Time students of University.

According to the University of Maryland Glossary of Medical Terms (2004), "stress is mental or physical tension that results mostly from physical and emotional causes". Selye (1976) also said that the body reacts to stressful situations in terms of complete mobilization of psychological resources which manifest in the form of anxiety, anger, sorrow, dejection and irritation.

It could therefore be viewed that stress is not culture-specific or bound to affect some group of people, it rather comes to everybody no 'matter your age, educational background, where he/she finds him/herself or status in life. The researcher had an interview with some Part-Time students' and they complained that the programme hurt their lives.

This was because some students who have high blood pressure had their blood pressure continuously going up anytime they went for a medical check-ups, worries of sleepless nights as a result of wanting to obtain good grades, difficulties of some students-workers to wake up from bed on time to prepare for work even though they have set an alarm to wake up from bed.

As said earlier, the issue of stress management among part-time students has become a major problem in recent times with regards to the stressful experience that students-workers go through since no student can confidently say that he/she has some ways or techniques to prevent, control or manage stress, hence, the problem is what is a stressful experience that students-workers go through?

To what extent will student-workers cope with stressful situations? What approaches or techniques and coping strategies should students and other stakeholders in education adopt or use it to treat and control stress responses or situations?

It is therefore poised to investigate students-worker stressful situations and determine appropriate stress reduction techniques or coping strategies for facing and directly coping with stress.

There were some instances where two students were quarried for closing from their offices before the stipulated time to attend lectures and a great number of students also stressing that they find it difficult to combine their normal office duties with the schooling because at certain times they are compelled to choose between overtime work and lectures.

2.   Literature Review

Stress is what we experience when our body systems perceive and react to an event or situation as threatening or challenging. Cooper (1996) sees stress as a state that occurs when people are faced with demands from the environment that require them to change in some way. Weiner (1992) also states that stress in the workplace is not an isolated phenomenon as in every organization, the workers experience various kinds of stress that impede the work progress of the organization.

Several working lives have been linked to stress. The conflict between home and work and the work impact on personal relationships is stressful (Marshall and Cooper, 1981). These and many other variables put the worker in a stressful situation. Cooper (1996) stated that people are experiencing too much stress in modern societies and student-workers in part-time programmes at tertiary levels are no exception. No doubt, stress has become one of the most widely used terms due to the work of doctors, social scientists, the media and other researchers.

Myres (1989), when people are under stress, they are prone to depression and other illnesses including peptic ulcer, hypertension and mental disorders which are debilitating to the health of individuals and may hamper the development of their potential in life. Students-workers face problems like work pressure, financial difficulties, relationships, busy schedules, behavioural and emotional indicators. It presupposes that since the above-mentioned problems, among others can cause stress; student-workers may be under stress.

2.1 Types of Stress

Stress is classified into two groups; good stress or 'eustress' and bad stress or 'distress'. Most people think that stress is always bad. Nothing can be far from the truth. A little stress is necessary for our survival in this highly competitive world.

Eustress:
Eustress is the good stress which helps us to improve on our performance. For example, if there is no stress of performing well in the exams or athletic events, students will not study hard or athletes will not sweat it out on the tracks. A certain amount of positive stress keeps us pepped up to meet all challenges and is necessary for our survival and progress in life.

Distress:
When stress gets out of hand, it becomes bad stress or distress which will bring out the weakness within us and make us vulnerable to fatigue and illness. If distress is continued unchecked, this will lead to all the ill effects of stress. Distress has two kinds; thus, acute stress and chronic stress.

Acute Stress:
Acute stress is the most common form of stress. It is inducted as a reaction to an immediate a threat, anticipated demands or pressures of the recent past of the near

future. The threats or demands can be real or perceived. Examples include rushing to meet a project deadline, stress over an examination, worrying about the fender-bender you just had, etc. Because it is short- the term, acute stress does not have enough time to do the extensive damage associated with long-term stress. However, it can pop up in anyone's life but it is highly treatable and manageable.

Chronic Stress:

Chronic stress involves situations that are not short-lived. It is the perpetual stress that wears on people continuously. It often develops when the individual does not see a way out of a bad situation. Typically, when the individual has no hope, they stop looking for a solution. Examples of chronic stress include relationship problems, workplace pressure and financial or health worries.

2.2 Educational Stress

Educational stress typically involves heightened physiological and psychological arousals accompanied by negative emotions, including anxieties that came as a result of undertaken or embarking on any academic programme. The educational stressor is any stimulus or event that disrupts or is perceived as a threat to physical or psychological wellbeing through education. For instance, one may sometimes feel that stress is everywhere, but it occurs only under serious educational settings.

2.2.1 Stress in Continuous Students

Stress in studies or academic stress is defined as the impact that educational organizations may produce on their students (Munoz, 2003; Polo, Hernandez and Pozo, 1996). Munoz (2003) further stated that there are four types of stressful situations identified in different studies on stress in students. They were assessment, workload, adaption transition problem in education and conditions of the learning process. These types are explained as follows;

> ➢ Students sometimes feel anxious when they are assessed because they are afraid of failing the examination. Other causes could be examination overload (many examinations at the same time or if the preparation for the examination comprises a a large amount of information) and ambiguity (uncertainty about the way the exam will be evaluated by the lecturer.

> ➢ Again, excessive assignments, excessive class hours, difficulties in planning time, lack of free time, difficulties in combining academic life and personal life, difficulties in keeping concentration, demands of practical activities and failed or lost courses. Students also make an effort when they have to adapt to a new role, rules, responsibilities and demands in a competitive academic environment.

> ➢ Furthermore, the relationship between the lecturers and part-time students that involves variables such as lecture style, lecturer expertise,

lecturer personality, feedback and support to students, expectations and conf1ict in the objectives, role ambiguity and so on. On the other hand, organizational variables such as schedule, course plan, class size, physical conditions and resources as well as student's participation in the decision-making process could create a stressful environment.

Stressful situations in the studies have negative effects on both students' health and performances. Considering health, stress has negative effects on students' immune systems. In the short term, students could experience changes in their emotional state (anxiety related to examinations), cognitive and emotional responses (consume cigarettes and coffee, dream alterations, appetite alterations and so on.

In the long-term, negative effects could reflect on distress, burnout, depression, low self-esteem, difficulties in relationships and drugs consumption. Considering their performance, when students experience a high level of stress, it affects them negatively on their motivations, examination performance, class assistance and class participation.

2.3 Occupational Stress

Schooling and working at the same time is one of the most stressful jobs in the world. Nowadays, many studies analyze this phenomenon (Verdugo and Vere, 2003). Kyriacou (1998) noted the following sources of stress in workers that have been reported consistently in a wide range of studies.

Performance at work: this result in feeling like staying off work, inability to manage time well, inability to meet deadlines, inability to concentrate, having a heavy workload, inability to delegate, feelings of inadequacy related to performance at work, job dissatisfaction, taking work home more frequently and low level of productivity.

Relationship with colleagues: it also results in increased feelings of irritation or aggression, becoming increasingly introverted, inability to relate to colleagues, unwillingness to cooperate, frequent irrational conflicts at work, inappropriate humour, non-motivation, withdrawing from supportive relationships, lying, role ambiguity and role conflict.

Behavioural and Emotional Indicators: loss of appetite, reduced self-esteem, increase the use of drugs (alcohol, tranquillizers, coffee and cigarettes), insomnia or nightmares, being unduly fussy, feeling of alienation, loss of confidence, too busy to relax, frequent illness (colds, influenza or other infections), pains or palpitations, accident-prone and persistent negative thoughts.

2.4 Effects of Stress

The phenomenon of stress has positive and negative side effects that are perceived to be threatening our wellbeing and tax our adaptive capabilities. The effects of stress are manifested in our psychological, physical and emotional lives.

2.4.1 Positive Effects of Stress

Weiten (1986) agree that stress has positive effects. One positive effect they theorized is that life would be very dull indeed if it were altogether devoid of challenges. Romano (1992) is of the view that an intermediate level of stimulation and challenger tends to be optimal for most people. In a sense, stress fulfils the basic needs of the human organism.

Again, stress promotes personal growth. Personal growth refers to the movement toward greater psychological health. Stress must sometimes force us to develop new skills, learn new insights and acquire new strengths. In other words, the adaptation process initiated by stress may often lead to personal changes for the better. Confronting and conquering a stressful may lead to an improvement in a specific coping ability and a favourable alternative in one's self-concept.

2.4.2 Negative Effects of Stress

Stock and Disorientation: Severe stress can leave people dazed and confused. In In these states, people tend to feel emotionally numb and they respond in a flat, apathetic fashion to events around them. They often state off into space and have difficulty maintaining a coherent train of thought. Their behaviour frequently has an automatic, rigid, stereotyped quality.

Burnout: Burnout is a buzzword for the eighties. This is a stress-related syndrome wherein one's behaviour comes to be dominated by feelings of physical, mental and emotional exhaustion. Physical exhaustion includes chronic fatigue, weakness, and low energy. Emotional exhaustion refers to feeling hopeless, helpless, trapped and emotionally drained. The mental exhaustion is manifested in highly negative attitudes toward oneself, one's work and life in general.

Disruption of Social Relations: There is evidence that stress can lead to deterioration in one's normal social relations. The effect of stress on interpersonal behaviour has not attracted much attention. However, researchers working with Vietnam veterans suffering from the delayed stress responses syndrome (also called posttraumatic stress disorder) observed disruptions in social functioning with some regularity. These disruptions include the feeling of alienation, difficulties in relating to spouses, friends and impairments in the capacity to love and trust others (Shatan, 1987).

Psychological Problems and Disorders: Based on clinical impressions, psychologist has long believed that stress might be a key factor in the causation of many kinds of psychological problems and mental illness in the domain of common psychological, insomnia, sexual difficulties, drug abuse, excessive anxiety, nervousness, dejection,

and depression. Above and beyond these, in our everyday problems, we have evidence that stress frequently plays a role in the onset of full-t1edged psychological disorders.

2.5 Strategies for Coping with Stress

Coping is the process of managing the internal and external demands that one appraises as taxing or overwhelming (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984). They have categorized coping strategies into two main forms: problem-directed coping or attempt to do something constructive about the stressful situation and emotional focused coping or efforts to regulate the emotional consequences of a stressful situation.

3. Research Methodology

Research methodology defines the systematic and scientific procedure used to arrive at the results and findings for a study against which claims for knowledge and evaluated (Agyedu, Donkor and Obeng, 2007). Against this background, it was found that the descriptive research the survey design was appropriate and used for the study because it gave room to ask a set of questions to a large number of respondents concerning the current status of the issue under study.

The participants of the study were made up of two hundred (200) part-time students of the Business School. The sample was selected using the simple random sampling method with emphasis on the lottery technique which gave each student on the programme an equal chance to participate in the study.

3.1 Population

The target population used for the study was the Evening Programme Students-Workers of the University with a population of nine hundred (900). This comprises Accounting, Banking and Finance, Purchasing and Supply Chain Management, Executive Office Administration and Business Management of all the four levels of students' groups.

3.2 Sample and Sampling Techniques

The sample population chosen for the study comprises a sample size of two hundred (200) respondents. Fifty (50) students were selected from each level (Levels 100-400) and ten (10) students of each level of the programmes students' study. Where a particular level is never offered a particular programme, the shortage was covered by the other programmes. A system of random sampling was adopted to select the respondents. The rationale for this selection procedure was to give each student an equal chance of being selected.

3.3 Research Instruments

To ensure effective data collection, a triangular data collection method was adopted to gather data needed for the work. The triangular method of data collection simply means using one data collection to evaluate the effectiveness of another data collection method. The validity and reliability of any information depending on the sources and methods of gathering that information. Interviews and questionnaires were used to gather the information needed for the project.

3.4 Data Collection Procedure

The questionnaire was administered to all the selected respondents for the study after permission was sought from the authorities as well as all the lecturers whose lecture periods were used for the distribution and collection of questionnaires. The average response time for the questionnaire was 30 minutes. All the respondents were allowed to take the questionnaire home overnight to enable them to get time to answer since the lecture period was too short (3 hours every evening). Ninety-five percent (95%) of the respondents answered the questionnaire and submitted them to the researcher.

3.5 Data Analysis

The data collected was edited for consistency. All the responses were coded in the definite categories for easy and adequate analysis. To make the work orderly and systematic, the data was divided into headings and where possible and appropriate findings on each category of responses juxtaposed on the single table. The ordinal scale of frequency, percentages and content analysis was the main statistical tools of the analysis.

4. Results and Discussions

4.1 Data Analysis Gender

It was necessary to analyze the gender of the respondents since it can affect the results of the study in that, where there are many males than females or vice versa, the results may not be representative of both genders since both genders may not have the same level of adaptation to stress. Table 1 is a summary of the gender analysis of the respondents.

Table 1. *Respondents Gender*

Gender	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Males	120	
Females	80	4060
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2020.*

Table 1 indicates that the males were 120(60%) thus 20% more than the females 80(40%). The gender analysis indicated that the only way gender significantly affected the results of the study was how often particular areas in the individual's activity was affected by stress. In the African context, women carry more of the burden on society than men. Therefore, the lower level of females in the respondents could give a lower result than if females were the majority.

Marital Status:

The next analysis focused on the marital status of the respondents. This is important since stress may differ significantly among married, single, divorced and widowed. A summary of the frequency and percentages of the respondents' marital status are presented in Table 2.

Table 2. *Respondents Marital Status*

Marital Status	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Single	70	35
Married	110	55
Divorced	18	9
Widowed	2	1
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2020.*

Table 2 indicated that there were 70 singles, 110 married, 18 divorced and 2 widowed respondents constituting 35%, 55%, 9% and 1% respectively. Generally, married people are grappled with many problems than singles and therefore are likely to be exposed more to stress than singles.

Divorced respondents may be facing social re-union problems together with difficulty in the upkeep of children were some of their challenges and these may contribute to the additional problem and therefore stress. Widows, apart from the social lost which is stressful and they also have additional family problems which increase stress. These show that majority of the part-time students are prone to stress from the data.

Age:

Respondents' age was analyzed to find out the various age groups that were in the sample population. A summary of the frequency of the respondents' age is presented in Table 3.

Table 3. *Respondents Age Group*

Age	Frequency	Percentage (%)
20-29	16	8
30-39	112	56
40-49	70	35
50-59	2	1

60 and above	0	0
Total	**200**	**100**

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2020.

Table 3 indicates the respondents' age analysis. It shows that most of them 112(56%) were between the ages of 30-39, followed by 40-49 being 70(35%), the middle age group is 20-29 years also representing 16(8) and 50-59 that 2(1%) respectively. No respondent is below 20 years. However, there was no respondent with age ranging from 60 and above. Majority of the respondents were younger. Recently, the life expectancy of Ghanaian and for that matter African is below 50 years.

In general terms, older people are prone to a higher level of stress than the younger students/workers. Since respondents fall under this group, age may not significantly affect the result of the study. For example, older students/workers were likely to be worried and overwhelmed about having to eat late at night, having fewer rest periods, having some social and domestic responsibilities interfering with their study time, having difficulties in concentrating on learning task and competing.

4.2 Identification of Stressful Experiences Students Go through

The common symptoms of stress among part-time students-workers which results in a constant change of behaviour have been analyzed in percentages in Table 4.

Table 4. *Distribution of common symptoms of stress among part-time students*

Stressful Experiences	**Frequency**	**Percentage (%)**
Annoying social behaviour of others	186	93
Accidents/clumsiness/mistakes of self (eg. Spelling, tripping etc)	177	86
Facilities/resources available	166	83
Unappealing with unhealthy eating (late meals)	160	80
Environmental (physical/working condition)	157	78

Source: Author's Field Survey, 2020.

Table 4 shows a pictorial representation of the salient symptoms of stress among students- workers. The prime sources of stress can be attributed to the annoying social behaviour of others, accidents/clumsiness/mistake, facilities or resources available, unappealing and unhealthy eating habits (late meals) and environmental (physical/working condition). One hundred and eighty-six (186) out of the 200 respondents representing 93% were of the view that annoying social behaviour of fellow workers and students alike is the highest among the five symptoms listed. They supported their opinion vehemently than most co-workers, as well as students, are very bossy and irritating.

Copper (1996) states that stress occurs when people are faced with demands from the environment that require them to change in some way and Wei Ten (1986) which also view stress as any circumstances or transactions within the environment that threaten or are perceived to threaten our wellbeing and tax our adaptive capacities is in support of this assertion.

Again, 172 respondents representing 86% said accident/clumsiness or mistakes happen to be among the major causes of stress. One hundred and sixty-six (166) respondents representing 83% also attributed the cause to facilities or resources available to students-workers while 160 respondents representing 80% thought that unappealing and unhealthy eating habits (late meals or eating in the night) has been the major cause of stress among part-time students of the Akenten Appiah-Menka University of Skills Training and Entrepreneurial Development (AAMUSTED), Kumasi Campus.

In furtherance, 157 respondents representing 78% admitted that environmental (physical or working condition) which are not favourable and make them experience stressful situations. The results of the conditions stated in table 4.4 gave rise to constant causal leave and permission most at times to some students-workers to stay away from work. These and other issues have affected their lifestyle at work since they enrolled on the programme and it has generated conflict between three of the people interviewed and their bosses.

Some of the students complained that they had very bad recommendations from their bosses during the year 2018 appraisal period. They were described as being lazy and not serious with their work. They further stated that they do not know their fate after the programme as regards their promotion to the next grade since some of their senior colleagues have been denied their promotion to Senior Officer Level which may help them to enjoy a lot of privileges at work because of bad reports that have been written about them after realizing they were schooling.

4.3 Effects of Stress on Part-Time Students-Workers

Stress has a lot of effects on students' lives. These could be positive or negative effects. Table 5 has been designed to deal with the extent to which stress affects the part-time students- workers of Universities. The responses of the 200 respondents are presented in table 4.5 with its analysis.

Table 5. *Frequency and percentage distributions of effects of stress on part-time students (Common areas that are affected by stress)*

Areas Affected	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Productivity	70	35
Job satisfaction	80	40
Absenteeism	90	45
Decision-making ability	60	30

Accuracy		40	20
Creativity		20	10
Attention to personal appearance		100	50
Initiative		40	20
Reliability		60	30
Alertness		86	43
Perseverance		40	20
Tiredness		180	90

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2020.*

Table 5 sought to find out the overall level of effects of stress experienced by students-workers with the use of these 12 listed above. Combining the responses from all the subjects, the overall the questionnaire, 70 representing 35% said stress affects their productivity, 80 respondents representing 40% saw their job satisfaction plunge; 90 respondents representing 45% were of the view that stress affects their work attendance.

Also, 60 respondents representing 30% said stress affects their decision-making ability which makes them have too much to think about at the same time. Forty (40) and 20 respondents representing 20% and 10% respectively said their accuracy and creativity levels decrease by stress while 100 subjects representing 50% had the opinion that their attention to personal appearance decrease making them inactive.

Respondents' reliability (30%), their alertness (43%) and perseverance (20%) levels respectively have all been reduced as a result of stress. So also, table 4.5 shows that majority of the respondents representing 90% agreed with the view that tiredness has been the major stress effects they experienced.

Marshall (1981) depicts that stress may lead to a narrowed form of attention, reduced flexibility in thinking, poor concentration and less effective memory storage support the frequency and percentage distributions of effects of stress on part-time students (Common areas that are affected by stress). Consequently, due to these, some students-workers have become habitual latecomers to work. They, however, look tired all time but manage to finish their day's activity on time.

This situation makes students come to the lecture hall psychologically ill-prepared to learn. Unfortunately, a Level 300 student who is supposed to be in Level 400 deferred the course because there was too much pressure on him from his immediate boss whenever he wants to attend lectures and the boss was around.

According to the student, the boss told him that he will not be allowed to use one stone to kill two birds so- far-as he remains the head of that unit, meaning "he cannot be going to school and at the same time working for money".

4.4 Managerial Strategies Students Can Adapt to Face Stressful Conditions

Managerial/coping strategies which students-workers can adapt to their stress levels have been presented in Table 6.

Table 6. *Percentage distribution of common means of stress management among students-workers*

Common Means of Stress	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Employee/student assistant programme	40	20
Employee empowerment programme	103	51.5
Educational assistance/reimbursement	94	47
Break	86	43
Wellness programme/on-site fitness facility financial counselling	54	27
Stress management seminars/classes	15	7.5
Training programmes	20	10
Therapy	30	15
Alternative schedule (Part-time/time off for family etc)	5	2.5
Others	0	0

Source: *Author's Field Survey, 2020.*

Table 6 depicts the representation of the salient area in the control of stress among students- workers. The prime stress solution is an employee empowerment programme, educational assistance/reimbursement, breaks, wellness programmes, employee/student assistance, training programmes, stress management seminars which accounted for 103(51.5%),94(47%),86(27%), 40(20%), and 15(7.5%) respectively.

Employee empowerment programmes talk about the programmes which employers organize for workers to refresh themselves to enrich their curriculum vitae to bring relief to them. For instance, asking workers to attend courses on the actual work they do and thus works schedule.

Also, reimbursement/educational assistance look at given study leave or opportunities to workers to update and upgrade themselves which will eventually reduce the stress they go through. Break refers to the rest after tedious work is done. Students-workers must be allowed some periods of rest. It could be causal or substantive annual leave which may give them enough time to refresh themselves.

The results in Table 6 are not different from research by Weiten (1986) which also views stress as any circumstances or transactions within the environment that threaten or are perceived to threaten our wellbeing and tax our adaptive capacities. This affirms the lack of therapeutic measures in the control of stress and the lack of

cognizance of the effect of stress on student-workers. Consequently, in analyzing the views of the various respondents concerning Table 6, it has been noticed that the majority of the respondents would wish that the University authorities and its management should adopt any of these means or measures to help manage students-workers stressful conditions.

5. Conclusion

In conclusion, stress and its management among part-time students should not rest on the University authorities alone but rather there should be a partnership between the University authorities and the part-time students. The students' challenges or grievances regarding their studies/work to stress and its management must be the priority of the University authorities as well as their employers.

Consequently, the part-time students themselves must access the various stress management measures or means and apply them in their lives.

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