

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY



Strategies used by Midlands State University Students to cope with academic stress.

BY

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DEDICATION

This dissertation is dedicated to my lovely parents Mr. E Machemedze and Mrs. F Machemedze.

ABSTRACT

The researcher sought to study on the strategies used by Midlands State University students to cope with academic stress. The research was enriched with a couple of theories, relevant literature by other authors and previous studies that supported the research. The students were sampled using stratified random sampling. Stratification comprised of strata that are first, second and fourth year students from the Psychology Department in the Faculty of Social Sciences who made up a total of one fifty six students with equal representation of males and females. The research instrument used were questionnaires which constituted demographic data, coping strategies and academic stressors. Data was analyzed through SPSS using descriptive statistics and was presented in the form of charts and bargrahps and tables. Major findings were that social support coping strategies are the most used by university students whilst emotional and avoidance coping strategies are the least used. The study also revealed that the four most common sources of stress included registration procedures, financial burdens ,in adequate material to do assignments and workload whilst the least sources of academic stress were poor performances and poor performances. Apart from that, the study revealed that coping strategies differ by gender with females students using more of emotional coping strategies and social support strategies whilst male students use more of distancing coping strategies and avoidance coping strategies. Recommendations to the university such as creating new strategies and strengthening existing initiatives were made to the university towards curbing academic stress .

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CHAPTER ONE

1.1 Introduction

This chapter focuses on the background of the study, significance of the study, statement of the problem, purpose of the study, research questions, objectives, significance of the study, limitations and delimitations of the study and definition of terms.

1.2 Background Study

Midlands State University is situated in Gweru in the Midlands Province of Zimbabwe which is a developing country and was established in the year 2 000 with about only 800 students by then. Currently the university enrolls more than 15 000 students.

Academic stress among university students has been a topic of interest for many years Ongori and Agolla (2009). University students encounter high distress due to various stressors. In addition to this, academic stress is a mental distress with respect to some apprehended frustration associated with academic failure, apprehension of such failure or even an awareness of the possibility of such failure (Gupta and Khan 1987). When students perceive stress negatively or become excessive it can affect health, academic performances and even social relations. Academic stresses can be an ultimate career stopper. The key to circumvent becoming a college dropout, as a resultant of academic stress is to identify its sources and strategies that students can employ to cope with academic stress. Thus the researcher has been motivated to carry out a study on strategies used MSU students to cope with academic stress. Coping strategies are specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological, that individual applies to master, tolerate and minimize stressful events (Lazarus 1993).

According to Macmillan Social Sciences Library Research, it was found that 70% of the college students say that their grades have an effect on their level of stress. A study carried out by Aasara (www.aasra.infor/articles and statistics) reported that depression among the youth has increased from 2% to 12% in the last five years and globally 3 out of every visit to the doctor are of academic stress related problems.

Beam and Hammer (2006) cited in Kausar (2010) conducted a study to examine students' perceived level of stress in relation to their academic workloads and coping strategies among

undergraduates students at the University of Edmonton in Canada. In the study 55% reported that they have to ignore one subject for the preparation other as a coping strategy. In addition to that, 42, 5% students reported moderate level of stress whereas in 27% stress was beyond manageable level.

However, in a study carried out among dental students in Greece on stressors encountered by dental students and their coping strategies academic stressors encountered were overloaded workload, financial difficulties and lecturer to student relations. (Polychronopoulos and Divaris 2009). In that study most students cited using problem focused strategies, followed by emotion focused strategies and a few used avoidant strategies to cope with academic stress.

According to Kumar and Bhukar (2013), a NIMHANS study reported that 36% techies in India (Blangore) show psychiatric disorder. In addition to that, the findings state that globally 1 out of every 10 students suffers significant distress whilst 66% of CEO's India is stressed and 11% find it too much to handle. In the same study, 72% of students in India are unaware of how to deal with academic stress and its ill effects. In 2006 alone, 5857 students committed suicide owing to exam stress and 27,6% of IT professionals in India are addicted to narcotic drugs (Kumar and Bhukar (2013). In that, study most of the students used active coping strategies whilst a few used avoidant copying strategies.

Being a student at Midlands State University, the researcher perceived that some students are being affected by many stressful situations or problems at times affecting their psychological wellbeing and their performance in their studies. Some students are repeating levels and semesters because of poor performances, some engage in aggressive and violent behaviors, some have committed suicide, others attempted to commit suicide, some are dropping out of college and some quarrel with others over petty issues. In addition, some are engaging in abnormal behaviors such as prostitution, substance and drug abuse. All these activities might be of academic stress they are facing in their studies. Thus, this study seeks to find out what strategies MSU students use to cope with academic stress.

Therefore, a good understanding of coping strategies is very crucial in providing the students with direction about what to change and promote in their road to academic achievement and increasing their knowledge base of strategies to use when facing academic stress.

1.3 Problem statement

Stress is a rampant phenomenon among university students emanating from academic stressors as a result engaging in behaviors such as prostitution, drug abuse, committing suicide, attempt to commit suicide, dropping out of college and repeating levels some of which are detrimental to their education career, psychological wellbeing and even their social relations. Therefore, this study seeks to explore strategies used by MSU students to cope with academic stress

1.4 Purpose of the study

The study aims to unravel the academic stressors faced by students and strategies used to cope with academic stress by university student. This will increase the knowledge base, level of understanding and awareness on strategies students can employ to cope with academic stress.

1.6 The objectives of the study are

- To find out what strategies do MSU students use to cope with academic stress.
- To find out academic stressors that affect MSU students.
- To find out if these coping strategies differ by gender.
- To find out if these coping strategies differ by level.

1.5 Research Questions

- What strategies do Midlands State university students use to cope with academic stress ?
- What are the academic stressors faced by MSU students?
- Do these coping strategies differ by gender?
- Do these coping strategies differ by level?

1.7 Hypothesis

- There is a significance difference between academic stressors and coping strategies.

1.8 Significance of the study

The current study is important because it explores the various strategies that are used by students to cope with academic stress and this will help them to gain more knowledge and insight on the strategies used to cope better with academic stress during university life education. The research also aims to demonstrate and identify various sources of academic stressors students encounter; this could provide better insights to university administrators, lecturers and supervisors in initiating efforts to monitor, control and minimize the intensity of academic stress. Additionally, the study could provide baseline data for further studies in the area. Furthermore, to the field of psychology the research will be important in that documented strategies used by university students can be integrated in the counseling psychology modules. The public and the community will also be beneficiaries from the research in the sense that they will become well acquainted with some academic stressors that MSU students face and this will aid those who want to send their children and those who have children to fully support them and put initiatives, programs or strategies that will help the students to curb academic stress.

1.9 The following assumptions of the study are

- The respondents taking part in the study will cooperate
- The respondents have an understanding of coping strategies to academic stress
- The environment will be conducive to allow easy collection of data
- The responses from the data gathering methods to be used are correct and truthful and that the sample response represents the entire population characteristics.

1.10 Delimitations

The research will be conducted at Midlands State University in Gweru on psychology students only in first year to fourth year. The research focuses on the various strategies to cope with academic stress encountered by university students.

1.11 Limitations

A limitation of the study is the limited sample size. Students from the Faculty of Social Sciences from Psychology Department will participate only in the study limiting study participants and possible findings. Thus, the findings cannot be generalized to other universities and other university degree programs .Repetition of the study with a larger stratified random sampling would increase knowledge among university students.

1.2 Definition of Terms

Stress → an individual psychophysiological response mediated automatic nervous system and the endocrine system, to any demands made by an individual (Lazarus 1993).

Academic stress → a pervasive sense of urgency to learn all these things related to academic demands.

MSU → Midlands State University.

Constructive copying strategies → the specific efforts, both behavioral and psychological that are counterproductive, which individuals employ to master or cope with stressful situations.

Stressor → any factor that causes an individual to be stressed that is situational or internal.

1.13 Conclusion

This chapter serves as an overview of the topic of the research study, “Strategies used by Midlands State University students to cope with academic stress”. The Researcher introduced the research study and gave the background study to familiarize the reader with what the whole study is about. It also covered the statement of the problem and the importance of the study. The researcher looked into the specific objectives of the study, its scope and purpose as well as its

significance. It also looked at the study limitations, delimitations and assumptions and explained the statement of the problem at length. The following chapter looks into a review of related literature to the research.

CHAPTER TWO

Literature review

2.1 Introduction.

This chapter will focus on the works of other writers or researchers that have assembled from their studies and researches. It will give the definition of coping strategies and outline the components and effects of academic stress on university students. The researcher will explore the strategies used by university students to cope academic stress. According to Cooper (1984) cited in Creswell (2003) the purpose of literature review is to share with the reader the results of other studies that are closely related to the study being reported, it's related to large ongoing dialogue in the literature about the topic, filling in the gaps and extending prior topic studies. Previous research studies and theories that are relevant on the topic understudy would be examined which will permit the researcher to identify knowledge loopholes and come up with concrete arguments on the reviewed literature. Literature review gives an analysis of what other researchers think about the topic. Hence literature review targets on the discovery of what other researchers have documented about the strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress and other related researches that are of significance to the study at hand. The literature review summarizes, evaluates and clarifies the literature. The focus of the study will be adding on and enlightening the work that had been done in previous.

2.2 Coping strategies

Coping is the behavioral and cognitive efforts used by individuals in the face of stressful situation, event and demand. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) coping strategies can be viewed as what an individual actually thinks and does in a particular situation. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assumed coping strategies to have two primary functions, managing the problem and governing the emotions relating to the stressors. Appraisal of a situation depends with the coping resources available when one encounters a stressful situation. According to Wilson et al (1996), understanding the nature and effects of stress is linked to the concept of coping, and the availability and use of specific coping mechanisms strongly influences individuals'

psychological and physiological responses to stressors. An example of emotional coping strategy is praying to God trying to seek answers when facing academic stress. Both cognitive and behavioral coping strategies can be effective in modifying the effects that stress can have on individuals.

Problem focused coping and emotion focused coping have been propounded by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their cognitive transactional model. Mattlin (1990) states that emotion oriented strategy, efforts are directed at altering emotions and they include attempts to reframe the problem in such a way that it no longer evokes a negative emotional response and elicits less stress. According to Lazarus (1991) emotional focused coping strategies include seeking social support for emotional reasons, positive reinterpretation and growth, acceptance, turning to religion, focus and venting of emotions whilst problem focused coping strategies include active coping, planning, seeking social support for instrumental reasons, restraint, suppression of competing activities and reframing. In a study of first year students, those with greater positive affect were more likely to use, emotion focused coping strategies such as instrumental support to cope with academic stress (Pritchard and McIntosh 2003). Those who used emotion-focused strategies because of academic stress were more likely to experience thoughts of dropping out of college, and those who used venting were more likely to experience negative attitudes toward school (Pritchard and McIntosh 2003).

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) purported another form of coping strategy known as avoidant coping strategies; these include denial, behavioral disengagement, mental disengagement, and alcohol and drug abuse. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stipulate that avoidance oriented include coping strategies such as avoiding the situation, denying its existence or losing hope, people who perceive stressful situations as uncontrollable elicit more avoidance strategies. Avoidant coping strategies can be regarded as maladaptive coping strategies as they cause health problems such as impairment of memory, chronic heart diseases and asthma.

College students implement these various coping strategies in a bid to cope with various stressors that have an impact in their academic studies. According to Carver et al (1989) undergraduates who believed it was possible to change stressful situations were more likely to engage in problem focused coping strategies such as active coping and planning. University students who use optimism and self-efficacy as coping strategies in their academic studies can attain better

grades and perform better and would be able to deal with other stressful events they encounter during the college life period. Conversely, students who have pessimistic minds and lack confidence in their academic work have a high probability of attaining poor grades and fails.

2.3 Academic stress and its sources or components

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) define stress as a particular relationship between the environment and the person. Stress has been dominant among university students, as the higher education system is more challenging and demanding prior to vast workloads, too much research, deadline submission of assignments or dissertations, social stressors and financial problems. Academic stress is the products of a combination of academic related demands that exceed the adaptive resources available to an individual (Wilks 2008). Academic stressors include the perception of the student's perception of the extensive knowledge base required to develop it (Carveth et al, 1996). Abourise (1994) goes on to purport that students report experiencing academic stress at predictable times each semester resulting from exams, grade competition and large amount of time. Other potential sources of academic stress include excessive homework, unclear assignments and uncomfortable classrooms (Kohne and Frazer 1986)

Methods to reduce stress by students often include effective time management, social support, positive reappraisal and engagement in leisure activities (Murphy and Archer 1996). Institutional level stressors are overcrowded lecture halls, semester system and inadequate resources to perform academic workload (Awino and Agolla,2008).

University students have many impediments to tackle to attain optimal academic performance. One as a university student has to be bold enough, as it takes a lot more than just studying to attain a successful career. Various stressors such personal problems, time management and economic problems all pose their own threat to as a student's academic performance (Awino and Agolla 2009).

Many factors contribute to stress being experienced by students but the following are associated with academic stress based on the literature review: time management issues, financial burdens, interactions with lecturers, personal goals, social activities to the campus and lack of social networks (Wilks 2008). Agolla and Ongori (2009) reiterates that components of academic stress as expectations of family members/parents ,academic workloads ,attending lectures, inadequate

material, overcrowded classrooms, uncertainty in getting a job after graduation/ worrying about the future. Additionally ,Masih and Culrez (2006) state academic stress emanates from admission procedures, high standards of parents, curriculum being concept laden, inappropriate school timing, on conducive physical environment of classrooms, the absence of healthy teacher student interaction, teaching methodology and indifferent attitudes of teachers.

Curriculum and instruction related stressors are a component or source of academic stress ((Nandamuri and Gowathami 2010). As a university student, one has to participate in the curriculum and instruction process by attending completion of assignments, reading and understanding of assignments, reading and understanding the specified topics, complying with the attendance requirements in the form of completing group tasks compulsory for assessment (Nandamuri and Gowathami 2010). In addition to this, students encounter academic stress as a result of the curriculum and instruction related stressors such as class work, amount of material to study and studying for test and exams, writing essays and fear of failing. Students face academic stress because the work is too demanding and challenging and there would be need for students to reach deadlines and to balance the social life and the academic studies.

More so, **teamwork related stressors** also cause academic stress among university students. According to (Nandamuri and Gowathami 2010) university students, face teamwork problems such as difficulties in adjusting to group mindset, communicating between team members as well as class members and making joint students. Imperatively what might create a high probability or potential of academic stress to emanate is that formal groups might be selected without paying attention on habits, preferences and individual likes and dislikes.

According to Ongori and and Agolla (2009) university students can face academic stress because of the **financial constraints**. Significantly, university students need financial resources to carter for academic related issues such as paying of tuition fees, buying study related material and even some would need money to finance their projects. However, if students face financial difficulties this can lead to academic stress. Apart from this, **intrapersonal problems and social problems** can also propel academic stress since some students come from very poor backgrounds, may be married, a parent or a caretaker for an older family. This places greater

academic stress to the individuals in comparison to younger students with lesser responsibilities to take.

Poor interpersonal skills are another sources or component of academic stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) if one perceives a situation as stressful, challenging, or harmful and lacks resources to cope he or she is likely to be negatively affected. In the context of university students, if one perceive academic life as thought provoking and challenging and lacks strategies to cope with the demands of the academic studies he or she is likely to succumb to academic stress.

Poor time management skills are also a source of academic stress. University students who lack good time management skills are unable to handle heavy workloads in their studies, thus these results in academic stress (Awino and Agolla 2009). Poor performances and fails in studies results when one as a student has the inability to control time and does not find time to relax outside academic studies demands.

2.3.1 Effects of academic stress

Some students endure academic stress whilst others experience distress, which then causes the emergence of behavioral and psychological problems. Ekuthu and Chafra (2006) purport that pressure to perform well in the examination makes academic environment very stressful. This is likely to affect the social relations both within the institution which affects individual person's life in terms of commitment to achieving the goals (Fairbrother and Warn 2003). Academic stress also affect the student's social relations within or outside the university and the individual's personal life in terms of commitment to achieve their goals (Ongori and Agolla 2009).

In addition to this, Ongori and Agolla (2009) cite that academic stress has been associated with outcomes such as suicides, violent behavior or even social withdrawals and according to a research carried out at Botswana University there has been alarming cases of violence and academic year never passes without a case of murder taking place in the campus. Ekuthu and Chafra (2006) state that when individuals face academic stress, they become disorganized and therefore will be less able to cope up, thus resulting in stress health related problems.

Andrews and Wilding (2004) cite that students in United Kingdom at the University of Oxford reported experiencing academic stress, which resulted in poor mental health and academic

performance. According to the New Times (2007) academic stress is one of the factors that affect mental health, for example depression and anxiety, which may lead to suicide. In addition to this, averagely seven Malaysians commit suicide each a day 13.7% are students who have mental health problems (New Times 2007). It is also important to note that academic stress experiences by university students can lead to poor results in course work marks and examinations. In addition, other students facing academic stress engage in excessive worrying, loneliness, quarreling with other students over petty issues and this can also lead them to aggressive and violent behaviors.

According to Wilson et al (1996), on average, students who are exposed to severe psychological stress because of academic stress are less healthy and develop more physical illnesses than their less stressed peers. Too much academic stress can have devastating effects on students' health, contributing to stirring many problems including heart diseases, high blood pressure, stroke, depression and sleep disorders (Ekuthu and Chafra (2006). The implication is great for mental and physical well-being if one is uncertain with the psychological, emotional and behavioral abilities to deal with stress posed by academic studies. Due to the inability to cope with academic stress some students commit suicide (Ongori and Agolla 2009) and these individuals are perceived as not competent enough when they face stressful situations.

In addition to this, according to a study carried on at the University of Louisiana in the United States there were high rates of university dropouts (Kaufman, Alt and Champman, 2000). In this study the students cited that they decided to drop out of the colleges because of the high demands of the university posed by overloaded course work, and too much tests and others also decided to change programs since they were unable to cope with stress emanating from their academic studies. It is also imperative to note that students who are unable to cope with academic stress produce poor performances or fails in their courses leading some of them to repeat levels, defer or even change programs.

More so academic stress among university students lead students to engage in abnormal behaviors that affect their physiological and psychological wellbeing such as the use of drugs and substance abuse and even students engage in prostitution. Also female students can exchange sex with male counter parts so that they can get assignments or work written which they may

perceive to be too heavy for them and some even go on to have sex with other lectures to get marks. In this way, the students would use these behaviors to deal with the academic stress they would be facing.

2.4 Theories and Models

2.4.1 Cognitive- Transactional Theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1984)

Stress is a particular relationship between the environment and the person (Lazarus 1991). The Cognitive –Transactional theory suggests the response an individual relies is based on the individual's interpretation of the stressor and the interpretation of one's ability to cope up with it (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Because of different appraisals of a situation, students react differently to the same situation in different ways. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stated that people use either cognitive or behavioral appraisal when they face a stressful situation. People who have high self-esteem are most likely to perceive a stressful situation as penetrable and have a view that they have the capacity to conquer the situation. The primary appraisals evaluate or judge the significance of a situation whether it is a challenge, stressful or harm whilst the secondary appraisal evaluates the coping option and the resources to deal with the stressor that might be internal such as strength or determination and external ones such as support from others Lazarus and Folkman (1984) . In academic situations mostly the task specific competence on the prerequisite knowledge to cope with the task is of primary importance (Lazarus 1991).

Lazarus (1991) then goes on to purport that antecedents are person variables such as commitment and beliefs which are of great significance as they determine situational stress relevance and stakes at hand. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) went on to identify two coping strategies that are used to manage stressful events that are problem focused which include strategies such as adapting to new ways to manage the stressor more effectively, generation of alternative ways to deal with the situation and having new perceptions when facing a new situation.(Gross 2005) states that emotion focused strategies involve individual's attention to emotional responses to the stressors through venting, seeking social support, wishful thinking , acceptance or denial . By using the aforementioned strategies, university students tend to apply them differently in overcoming academic stress.

The cognitive- transactional theory of Lazarus and Folkman (1987) is relevant to this particular study on the strategies used to cope with academic stress because it helps in understanding coping strategies that students can use when one is facing a stressful situation and how individuals perceive stresses which shows that students' personalities play a pivotal role since some endure stress whilst others do not.

2.4.2 The model of coping modes by Krohne (1993)

Stressful and anxiety-evoking situations are comprised of aversive stimulation and high degree of ambiguity (Krohne 1993).The model of coping modes focuses on two main coping strategies that are vigilance and cognitive avoidance coping strategies. The employment of vigilant strategies follows a plan that is aimed at minimizing the probability of anticipated occurrence of aversive events (Krohne 1993). Krohne (1996) states that cognitive avoidance strategies aim at shielding the person from an increase in an arousal motivated coping behavior and individuals who are especially affected by uncertainty experienced in most situation are supposed to habitually employ vigilant coping. According to Krohne (1993) the two coping strategies are related to ones' personality in that habitual preference or vigilant coping strategies review individual differences in the susceptibility to emotional arousal or uncertainty (stressful situations). The model of coping modes is of great importance as it shows that personality is a determinant of how the two main coping strategies can be adopted by students to deal with academic stress.

According to Krohne (1993) the model of coping modes, there are four coping modes that emanate from the two main coping strategies vigilant and cognitive avoidant coping strategies. People who score high on vigilant coping strategies are called sensitizers and they mainly focus on reduction of uncertainty by only focusing their attention on stress relevant information. Krohne (1993) also identifies individuals who score high on cognitive avoidance coping strategies as repressors and they reduce the experience of arousal by avoiding stressful situations or information. The third mode stated is that of non-defensive people who have low scores on both dimensions and these people should be flexible to the demands of stress situations.(Krohne 1993). This therefore shows that students should show their flexibility when facing various academic stressors in their academic life so that they would be able to cope.

Lastly the above-mentioned model suggests that people who exhibit high scores on both dimensions are called high anxious and they use vigilant coping or avoidant strategies to deal with the subjective uncertainty and emotional arousal that could have been caused by stressful situations. Because of the two goals that are in compactable in most situations, high anxious persons are assumed to show fluctuating and therefore less efficient avoiding coping behavior (Krohne 1993).

The model of coping modes is relevant to the study as it highlights the coping strategies namely vigilant and cognitive avoidance coping strategies that students can employ when facing stress (academic stress) basing on the personalities they have and how they perceive academic stress at hand at that time.

2.4.3 Hardiness theory by Kobasa (1979)

Kobasa (1979) propounded the theory of hardiness based on the individual personality. Greenberg (2006) purported that stress varies with people. The Hardiness theory goes on to emphasize on one's attitude towards a stress event as a determinant to solving the situation rather than how many stressors one experiences. The manner in which a stressor is perceived plays a vital role in the development of stress and disease.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stipulate that when a stressor is perceived as a challenge, less likely to result compared to when it is perceived as a threat. Kobasa (1979) considered that people in high stress personality trait consisted of commitment, control and challenge based on existential theories. People who have personal beliefs in their capacity to cope or influence a stressful situation contain hardiness characteristic control and committed people are those that actively engaged in their daily living and have clear objectives in their life Kobasa (1979).

Hardy individuals consider Kobasa (1979) states that change as normal part of living and an opportunity for growth and development. Thus students can perceive academic stress differently, which enable them either to adopt transformative coping as altering stressful events and acquiring optimistic views, which enables them to penetrate through the academic circles. Such individuals attain coping strategies that include development and enforcement of plan of action mobilizing resources used in a bid to cope with stressful situations (Kobasa 1979). Conversely other people use regressive coping in which individuals have a pessimistic mind, such

individuals can be enlivened to students who lose hope after failing an in class test hence perceiving the final exam as impenetrable or fail. The above theory also suggests that hardy individuals engage in more adaptive coping strategies that include transforming coping and social resources that result in less strain enduring good well-being and less adaptive coping than low hardy individuals do.

The Hardiness theory is relevant as it mainly focuses on one's attitude or perception towards a stressful event .Furthermore the Hardiness theory shows that personality plays a pivotal role in students as they decide which coping strategies they regard as favorable to themselves in the face of academic stress. Some students endure academic stress as they view challenging situations as gateways to success and having enough resources to cope up with whilst the vice versa is true.

2.4.4 Social Support theory-Sarason and Sarasin (1985)

Stress emanates from the lack of social support to respond to stressful events adequately Greenberg (2006). Social support helps individuals to deal with stressful events or situations in a bid to reduce stress (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Significantly, social support helps individuals under stress as a coping strategy in four vital forms that include emotional support, instrumental support which involves provision of tangible aid and services that directly assist a person in need through close friends and religious mates informational support that involves provision of advice ,suggestions and information that a stressed person can use and lastly appraisal support that involves provision of information that is used for self-evaluation purposes, constructive ,feedback and affirmation (House 1981).

Greenberg (2006) stated that contact with other people in a church or synagogue or other spiritual groups usually bring one in close contact with other people of similar characteristics .Thus, religion is used as coping strategy by individuals facing stress in their lives. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) assumes that a larger and broader network is better than a smaller one and another assumption is that having a relationship is the same as perceiving or receiving support from it. Thus, socially supportive relationships may serve as a buffer against effects of stress and protecting people from some common physical or psychological reactions such as lethargy or guilt (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Social support has been shown important in children's abilities to develop social competences, supportive parental relations have also been beneficial

for college aged students (Repetti et al 2006) .Lazarus, and Folkman (1984) stipulated that social support from family members and peers is of great importance in stressful situations. In this light, association with others aids to reduce signs and symptoms of stress such feelings of anxiety and depression, which may compact on health and helps to deal with stressful situations.

Thus, the Social support theory is of much greater significance because it shows that students can use social support from friends, lectures and family members to cope up with academic life as they get information or strategies that can be constructive and helpful. The theory also reveals religion as vital instrument in which students can acquire and share knowledge that is constructive and future enlightening when facing stressful situations in their academics and this will enable them to succeed.

2.5 Previous Studies

A number of studies have been carried out on the strategies used to cope with academic stress globally, and regionally.

2.5.1 National perspective

In a study carried out at Midlands State University in Zimbabwe by Kasayira et al(2007), a greater percentages of students did not have problems with coping with stress at the campus about a third of the students were failing to cope with stress. In this quantitative study confrontative positive coping strategy had the highest frequency of 25% whilst the lowest frequency percentage was 2.49% for compromise negative coping strategy. The sample of the population comprised of first years, second years and fourth years. Female students were found to use more palliative and compromise positive coping strategies whilst male students were more relatively using more confrontative positive strategies. The Midlands State University also faced stressors such as financial difficulties and library materials as the greatest sources of stress. Other academic stressors that the students faced included library material, lecturer related problems, work related problems and learning skills related problems.

In this study on a national perspective information pertaining on coping strategies used by university students were reviewed of which it was done long back in 2007 even though the research understudy is being carried at the same institution at a period when the economy of

Zimbabwe was under a heavy recession compared to the present moment. However do university students to cope with academic stress use knowledge no other university in Zimbabwe carried out a study on strategies.

2.5.2 Regional perspective.

A study was carried out in Nigeria according to the International Journal of Social Sciences-Special Issues (2012), on identifying different perceptions of academic stress and reaction based on gender among first year students. The study reported that male and female student had different perceptions towards, frustrations, financials, conflicts and self-related stressors. In addition, there were no differences in perceptions of pressures and changes related. In the same study, female students reported higher scores in their perception of academic stress.

The above study was carried among 2 520 first year students using systematic random sampling from six different universities in Nigeria. Thus, there are differences in the area of study with the current study, geographical location and population sample but the target population is the same.

Moreover, at the University of Botswana in Botswana, Ongori and Angolla (2008) carried a study on academic stressors faced by university students. The study showed that academic workload as the greatest sources of stress with 81%, also academic related stressors such as continuous performance were regarded as stressful and had a frequency of 56% whilst finding relations with fiancés and inadequate resources to do assignments had frequencies of 42% and 66% respectively.

Furthermore, a study was carried on stress among part time business students at the College of Technology Education at Kumasi in Ghana and the results showed that most common source of stress among part time student in COLTEK was interpersonal (Ethe 2010) . The four of the five most common source of stress reported by the participants in this study were interpersonal source ,”change in sleep habit” reported by 73.3% of the respondents, “change in eating habit” reported by 69.9% of the respondents, “combining job and schooling” reported by 63.7% and “financial difficulties “reported by 63.3% (Ethe 2010). The other source of stress that the students cited in the study was the zeal to perform well. In another words this stressor causes academic stress.

In addition to this, according to Bojuwoye (2002) a study on students' assessment of the most stressful events in the first year was carried on South African Universities students. The study revealed that most stressful situations faced students in their first year were related to financial difficulties, demands of the university environment and administration. The students viewed academic work as stressful and challenging because they had been used to less work during their high school. In this study the first year students cited that too much assignments and too much exams as stressful in their academic studies.

Mostafa et al (2001) carried out a study on students at Mansoura University in Egypt and the study revealed that the students encountered various stressors that ranged from relation issues, personal troubles, academic pressures and environmental problems. Academic stressors that posed stress were revealed in the study as congested classroom, inconsiderate and insensitive fear of future and class workload as the most frequently encountered. Averagely each student reported a mean of 4, 6 stressors and academic stressors were the most frequent stressors.

In this study literature on regional perspective sources of academic stress were reviewed. The literature review showed that there is no research that has been done on strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress to the researcher's knowledge. The literature does not also show differences in academic stress coping strategies pertaining to gender differences and academic levels.

2.5.3 Global studies

Academic stress literature on coping strategies suggest that the personality of an individual plays a pivotal role on determining what coping strategy students employ to deal with academic stress Kausar (2010). Kausar (2010) carried a study on academic work load and use of coping strategies by university students in Pakistani. The overall findings of the study support that students used practical coping , avoidance focused coping, religious coping and active distractive coping in their respective order of frequency when facing perceived stress and academic workload. The use of religious coping was similar to a qualitative study on Malaysian medical students carried out by Redhwan et al (2009). Academic workload encountered by students was perceived as having a positive relationship with practical coping strategies and negative relationship with distractive coping strategies and avoidance coping used by students.

Also conclusions in the study showed that students who had more academic workload used more practical coping strategies to deal with academic stress such as discussions, taking reading notes and reading material whilst students with less academic stress used active distraction coping strategies such as visiting friends, movie watching and indulging in recreational activities. Such findings of using recreational or leisure activities were similar to those of Misra and Mckean (2000).

Mattlin (1990) found that students also use cognitive emotional related behavior such as positive reconceptualization of the stress inducing events to cope with stress .In support of personality types as a major contributor to the students' perception of being anxious about the studies and academic performances. Chappe et al (2005) found that students who are more test anxious got low grade point average than non-anxious. Thus, this suggests that students who are not anxious about tests or exams are the ones that excel in their studies.

In a research carried out in the United Kingdom on coping strategies used by Missouri University student in their studies, students generally reported using proactive behavioral coping strategies such as managing time, solving problems and seeking information or help (Misra and Mckean 2000). Misra and Mckean (2000) carried out a research examining the relationship between academic stress, anxiety , time management and leisure satisfaction among university students and the research predicted that students reported experiencing the aforementioned stressor during their academic studies were involved in leisure activities to deal with the stressors they encountered. In the same study by Misra and Mckean (2000) female students benefited less from leisure activities than male counterparts did in coping with stress, however female students had more effective time management or coping strategies than males and profited from them. In this light it can be viewed that leisure activities were used as coping strategies to deal with academic stress. Fram and Bovillian (2001) also found that students develop better thinking skills, including learning to use specific learning in a bid to deal with increased complexity of material to be learned and the greater time to do so. Hence, this shows that university students have to develop coping strategies that enable them to deal with academic stress.

In addition, another study was carried out in China on first year students and the purpose of the study was to view how the students cope with academic stress (Tao et al 2000). In a bid to deal

with academic and social experiences that might pose threat to the students, the study revealed that efficacious beliefs through hard work and determination and social networks to communicate with other peers were used as coping strategies by the students. The use of social networks as a coping strategy by university to deal with stressful situations was supported by studies carried by Misra and Mackean (2000) at the University of Missouri in UK.

According to a qualitative study at Monash University in Malaysia carried out by Redhwan et al (2009) on second year students, students used a variety of strategies to cope with stress including academic related stress which included counseling, talking with their friends, mediation, sharing problems, sleep well and exercise. In this study, the students also used mediation such as yoga to deal with stress, as the majority of the students who participated in the study were Indians for whom yoga is commonly practiced; taichi was reported among Chinese and prayers among Malays. Thus, this was similar to the studies that were done by Seyedfatemi et al (2007). Counseling was used as another coping strategy that students used. A similar finding was reported by Seyedfatemi et al (2007), that professional counseling and talking to a counselor as the most coping strategies used by nursing students in Iran during their university life. Also the use of friend in coping with stress supports Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s notion that social support from either friends or family members is an effective strategy to deal with stressful situations.

In another study Yosuff et al (2010) examined the sources of stress among 761 medical students in one of the universities in Malaysia. The reports from the study revealed academic related stressors that posed stress on students as test and examination, large quantity of contents need to be learned, poor marks, inability to answer the teacher's questions, insufficient skill in medical practice, heavy workload and difficulty in understanding the questions. Yosuff et al (2010) then carried another study on Malaysian students in 2011 to examine various issues of stress among dental students, which included the prevalence of stress, types of stressors, consequences of stress and coping strategies adopted by students to deal with stress. Guthrie et al (1995) cited in Yosuff et al (2010) state that studies in United Kingdom that have examined coping strategies on medical students with stresses of undergraduate students have generally identified the use of alcohol and drugs as a coping strategy. In the study academic related issues, patient management and clinical management were the sources of stress. The study revealed that students used social

support informs of talking to friends as a way to deal with stress, thus this was similar to the findings of Redhwan et al (2009).

Furthermore, Kang et al (2009) reported that a stress coping programme based on mindful mediation was an effective coping intervention for nursing students in Korea to minimize stress and anxiety. In the same study Kang et al (2009) revealed that talking to friends was the most common stress relieving factor and similar findings were reported in Ireland talking with friends, peers and relatives was the most common method with stress. Similar, Cheng et al (2004) also found findings, among Black and Latinos students in China at the University of Huwai, the most frequent coping strategies were talking with friends, parents and participation in social activities. In the same study, Cheng et al (2004) found out that students used religious coping activities as a coping strategy in their academic studies. Moreover, in survey study carried among overseas students, Fang (1996) distributed a questionnaire to 527 overseas Chinese university freshman students studying in Taiwan. The study revealed that students selected to use different coping strategies to adjust emotional physical and mental stress. Positive attitudes and active approach were seen to produce better outcomes. Thus this supports that problem focused coping strategies have been proposed as a way to improve academic adjustments and academic performance, thus dealing with academic stress. Misra et al (2000) carried another study which examined stress experience by both faculty and students , using two forms of Gadzella's Student Life Stress Inventory (SLSI) (1991), and students' academic reactions to stress were measured 249 students and 67 professors were from University in Missouri completed the survey. The results showed that stress in students was often self-imposed (Misra et al 2000).With regards to gender, girls reported higher stress as a result of self-imposed stress and pressure (Misra et al 2000). There was also significantly higher scores than boys (Misra et al 2000).

In another study carried out in Taiwan at Taipei University according to Allen and Hebert (1991) cited in Misra et al (2000) girls were reported having been affected by negative events more often than boys. Misra et al (2000) cite Davidson Katz (1991) noted that boys are frequently not socialized to be as expressive of emotion, which could be perceived as weak or not masculine .Also, first year students noted stress due to change and conflicts, while senior students noted more self-imposed stress due to pressure from their academic studies. In this

study, differences in coping with behavior and social support, which control effects of stress were, reported (Misra et al 2000).

According to Williams et al (2005) a study was carried out in the faculty of Veterinary Clinical Science at Murdoch University in Western Australia looking into the level of stress encountered by 4th year and 5th year tertiary students and their coping strategies. Significantly differences in stressors and coping strategies used by 4th year and 5th year students were reported. Final year students experienced more often occurrence of work related stress, professional, interpersonal and professional problems than fourth year students. The study also revealed that cognitive emotional (adaptive and maladaptive) were used by 5th year students more often by than the 4th year students.

In this study literature similarities on academic stress coping strategies by university students at different universities were highlighted but there is little information of differences on academic stress coping strategies pertaining student's academic levels of which of which the available literature did not capture all academic levels.

2.6 Knowledge gap

There is a huge informational gap pertaining to strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress in African literature to the researcher's knowledge. The researcher saw that literature from Europe and Asia has documented strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress. However, there is little data published in Zimbabwe of which it was at MSU to the researcher's knowledge, the same university that the current study is being undertaken. The available literature is not current and it does not explore current information since at that moment (year 2007) Zimbabwe was under a heavy economic recession compared to the present moment so strategies that might have been used at that to cope with academic stress might be different with those used at the present moment .

Research findings that have been documented in universities in Europe and Asia are affected hugely by Eurocentric and Asian bias and hence cannot be generalized. What can be an academic stressor in Europe, Asia might not be an academic stressor in Zimbabwe because of differences in economies, technological advancement, and cultural values hence strategies employed by university students might be different.

In addition to this, there is little information on strategies to cope with academic stress focusing on students' academic levels of which the research understudy seeks to highlight. More so, there is little data on academic stress coping strategies pertaining to gender differences to the researcher's knowledge of which the research understudy seeks to highlight.

2.7 CONCLUSION

The chapter was mainly focusing on the literature review in which the researcher had been concentrating on previous relevant researches that have been done aiding in coming up with the theoretical base on which this research is centered. The chapter has also highlighted the definitions of key terms, some sections with different components, identifying conceptual and theoretical frameworks, theories and models related to strategies that can be used by individuals in stressful situations (students facing academic stress), knowledge gap as well as the summary of the whole chapter. The following chapter will be on focusing on the research methodology used in the research.

CHAPTER THREE.

Research Methodology.

3.1 Introduction

Babbie (1998) defines methodology as an operational framework within which facts are placed so that their meaning may be more clearly used by the researcher to obtain data. This chapter summaries how the researcher will collect data from the respondents (students) and then covers the research design, target population, population sample, research instruments, data collection procedures, data presentation and analysis. The source of information that will be used as primary sources of information is questionnaires. Thus, this chapter will be generally the map of how the research will be carried out on the ground showing the ways and means that were actually used to capture valid data that will provide an insight on the coping strategies university students at Midlands State University to cope with academic stress.

3.2 NATURE OF THE STUDY

The nature of the study is a quantitative approach .According to Creswell (2003) a quantitative approach is one which the investigatory primarily uses positive claims for developing knowledge (for instance cause and affect thinking, reduction to specific variables and hypothesis and question, use of measurement and observation, and the test of the ories) ,employs strategies of inquiry such as experiments and surveys and collect data on predetermined instruments that yield statistics data since the study was focused on exploring the strategies university students employ to cope with academic stress. The researcher opted to use this kind of research design method considering the desire to acquire first hand data from the participants to formulate rational and sound conclusions and recommendations of the study.

3.3 Research design

A research design is a way of setting up conditions to gather information with which to answer research questions (Coolican 2006). It is the strategy plan for a research project or programme setting out the broad outline and key features of work to be carried out and indicates how the research strategy addresses the specific aims and objectives of the study and whether the research

issue are theoretical or policy oriented. The researcher will use a descriptive quantitative design to find out the happenings in the wider world hence taking into consideration the present status that is the strategies used to cope with academic stress by university students.

Goodwin (2006) defines a survey as a structured set of questions or statements administered to a group of people to measure their ways, tendencies to act on, attitudes or values. Administration of surveys can be inform of written questionnaires, face to face interviews or telephone interviews, street interviews or via the internet and they are more effective when administered to a representative sample (Goodwin 2005). According to Babbie (1990) cited in Creswell (2003) the purpose of survey research is to generalize from a sample to a population so that inferences can be made about some characteristics attitudes or behaviors of a population. The researcher gives the advantages of questionnaires to highlight why he has chosen this research design over the others (interviews or the internet).

3.3.1 Advantages of surveys

- Surveys are relatively inexpensive (especially self-administered) as they are cost effective and less time consuming.
- They are able to carter for a large population sample.
- Surveys can be administered in remote areas through the use of mails, e-mails or telephone.
- They allow exoneration of much of information hence making students to explore much data on the strategies they use to cope with academic stress

3.3.2 Disadvantages of surveys

- The researcher must ensure a larger number the sample will reply.
- They are prone to social desirability effect.
- Surveys are inflexible as they call for the study design to remain the same throughout the research, therefore they are inflexible.

3.4 Target Population

A target population is defined as a community, which a given intervention is directed, whom results will be generalized to (Coolican 2006). The following characteristics constitute a target population, age group, geographical area and gender participants. This study used university undergraduate's students at Midlands State University as its target population. The target population comprised of 512 students from level 1.1 up to 4.2 in the Psychology Department from the Social sciences. The research got the target population from the Midlands State University Admissions Office.

3.5 Population Sample and Sampling technique.

Population consists of all members of some defined group while a sample is a subset population Coolican (2006). Population sample is a representative of the total population of a given area under study. The sample comprised of psychology students hence representing the university students' population from first year to fourth year students. The sampling process is very crucial to any researcher because the method of sampling determines representatives of the sample to the study population. The research will be carried out with both female and male students, with 156 undergraduate students from the faculty of social sciences in the Psychology department.

The students will be selected through stratified random sampling of groups with common elements, therefore a certain number in each level were selected using the enrolment registers considering gender during lecture time. In a group of 1.1 students 26 students will be selected 13 females and 13 males and 1.2 students 26 will be selected, 13 females and 13 males and in a group of 2.1 will be selected 26 students, 13 females and 13 males will be selected and in a group of 2.2 students 26 will be selected, 13 males and 13 females. In a group of 4.1 students 26 students, 13 males and 13 females and finally in 4.2 students 26 will be selected, 13 males and 13 females. Gray and Arisan (2006) purport that for a population size greater than 500, 30% should be sampled. For the purpose of the study, 156 students will be selected of which the researcher would work with. Both female and male students had an equal chance of being selected. The male students will constitute 50% of the population sample whilst the female students will also constitute of 50% of the population sample.

3.6 Research Instruments

Elsevier (2009) defines a research instrument as a testing device for measuring a given phenomenon such as a paper and pencil test, a questionnaire, an interview, a research tool or set of guidelines for observation.

3.6.1 Questionnaires

Questionnaires would be used as research instruments by the researcher. Coolican (2006) defines a questionnaire as a set of questions that have scales that are designed to generate data that is appropriate for further analysis. Questions were carefully crafted, sequenced and constructed in a bid to get an in depth of information that is useful and relevant to the study from the respondents under study. Both closed and open-ended questions were used. Open-ended questions will be used to exonerate more information from the students that is personal. Questionnaires bring forth qualities of data when used. The following are the pro and cons of using questionnaires. The questionnaire that was constructed comprised of three sections that is demographic of the participant, academic stressor faced by students and strategies used to cope with academic stress.

Section B constitutes of coping strategies subscales derived from the ways of coping checklist (WCCL) based on the Transactional model of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) to suit the academic environment. The model comprises of two categories that are problem focused and emotion focused coping strategies .The following are the subscales in the questionnaire distancing coping strategies (1-4), avoidance coping strategies (5-8),social support coping strategies (9-12), planful coping strategies (13-16),religious coping strategies (17-20) and emotional coping strategies (21-24)

Advantages of questionnaires.

- Practical and can be standardized therefore ensuring reliable results.
- Large amounts of information can be collected from a large number of people in a short period and relatively cost effective.
- When data has been quantified it can be used to compare and contrast other researches and can be used to measure change.

- They can be limited affection on reliability and validity if a number of people or the researcher carries out a study.

Disadvantages of questionnaires.

- There is no way how truthful a respondent is being (prone to bias).
- People may read differently into questions and there reply based on their own interpretation of the question. For instance, what is ‘good’ to someone maybe ‘poor’ to someone else, hitherto there is a level of subjectivity that is not acknowledged.
- There are vulnerable to social desirability.
- Questionnaires are argued to be insufficient in understanding some forms of information- changes of perceptions, behavior and attitudes towards events.

3.7 Pilot study

According to Creswell (2003) pilot test is important to establish the content validity of an instrument and to improve questions, format and the scale. The researcher will carry out a pilot study on a sample of ten Psychology students by distributing the questionnaire, (strategies used to cope with academic stress ire with three sections that is (a) demographic data- gender and academic level, (b) academic copying strategies and (c) academic stressors faced by the students during the course of the semester, thus testing reliability and validity of the instrument under study (questionnaires).

The students will be asked comment on the clarity, effectiveness of instructions, applicability and appropriateness of the questionnaire to the university environment context. A little bit of informed changes were made in the structure and content before data collection was conducted. It was taken into consideration that the ten Psychology students 4.2 students used in the pilot study were not included in the main study and no information was passed on.

3.8 Data collection procedures

In the quest to collect data, the researcher will seek permission from the responsible authorities at Midlands State University to carry out the study. Stratified random sampling using attendance

registers will be done distributing questionnaires to a total population of 156 students during lecture periods. This means that the researcher will also seek permission from the lecturers first. The study will be carried on at the beginning of the semester were the students had no immense pressure. This will allow the respondents to concentrate on the questionnaires thus giving detailed information. In distribution of questionnaires, an introductory letter that indicated areas of research, purpose of the research and commitment to confidentiality was circulated to all respondents. Distribution of gender, academic stress and coping strategies related questionnaires was done personally by hand and the researcher collected back after an interval of 40mins. The results from the questionnaires were then crafted and analyzed. The **156** copies distributed had the same sets of questions.

3.9 Data presentation and analysis

The researcher will use quantitative analysis. The researcher will use SPSS and Microsoft excel to analyze the data and data gathered will be organized, analyzed and described to give meaning to the research findings with pie charts, histograms and tables. Brief descriptions of the findings were included below graphs, pie charts and tables to give a much clearer picture of the outcomes and detailed meaning to the findings for an easier understanding and interpretation. Standard deviations, means and frequencies will also help to give a to the meaning to the data.

3.10 Ethical considerations

Observations of ethics were of great significance to the study. The researcher will firstly debrief the participants before carrying out the study that is explaining the whole purpose and process of the study before commencement and highlighting the importance of the research. In this research, the participants will be given assurance of confidentiality, by so doing there will be no disclosure of information such as names to other students as the information obtained will be personal and private. Thus, the study will apprehend ethical considerations such as debriefing, informed consent, confidentiality and privacy.

3.11 Conclusion

The chapter highlighted the methodology of the study, the research design that was used as well as the target population and population sample which gave insight to the representative group that the researcher used to gather information. Description of data collection procedures, presentation of data and the research instrument to gather data was done.

CHAPTER 4

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND INTERPRETATION

4.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents an analysis and interpretation of the results that were obtained from the questionnaires. The findings are presented according to research questions.

4.2 PRESENTATION OF RESPONSES TO QUESTIONNAIRES

Table 1: Response rate

Targeted sample	Responses	Response rate
156	136	87%

One hundred and fifty six questionnaires were distributed and a total of 136 were satisfactorily completed and returned which was 87% response rate.

4.2.1 Demographic response rate information on gender

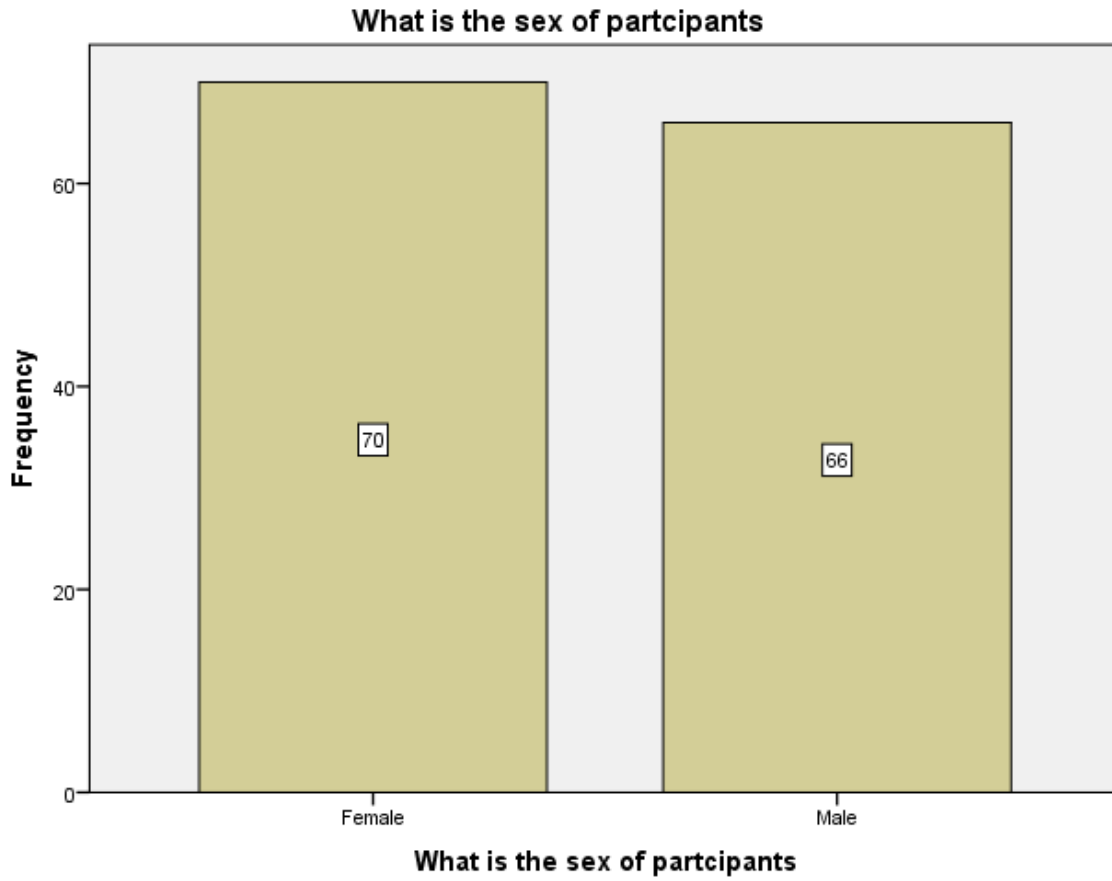


Fig 1

The histogram shows that the response rate for female students was 77 participants (51%) whilst male response rate was 66 participants (49%).

4.2.2 Number of participants according to academic level

Table 2

Participants' academic levels level

Level	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
1.1	22	16.2	16.2	16.2
1.2	20	14.7	14.7	30.9
2.1	23	16.9	16.9	47.8
2.2	22	16.2	16.2	64.0
4.1	23	16.9	16.9	80.9
4.2	26	19.1	19.1	100.0
Total	136	100.0	100.0	

The above table shows that 26 students from level 4.2 responded to the questionnaire, 23 students from level 4.1, 22 students from level 2.2, 23 students from level 2.1, 20 students from level 1.2 and 22 students from level 1.1.

4.3 What are the strategies used by MSU students to cope with academic stress?

Table 3

Coping strategies	N	Mean	Std. Deviation
Avoidance	136	7.35	2.159
Distancing	136	9.16	2.954
Social Support	136	10.61	3.058
Planful	136	8.83	2.569
Religious	136	8.83	2.569
Emotional	136	6.55	1.091
Valid N (listwise)	136		

The table shows that social support coping was the most used coping strategy by students with a mean of 10.61, followed by distancing coping strategies with a mean of 9.61, social support and religious coping with the same mean of 8.83, avoidance coping with a mean of 7.35 and the least used coping strategy was emotional coping (6.55).

4.0 Response rate to the sources of academic stress

Table.4

Source of academic stress	Frequency	Percent
Workload	87	64%
High parent expectation	32	24%
Competition from other students	16	12%
Poor performances	22	16%
In adequate material to do assignments	80	59%
Financial burdens	96	70%
Pressure for preparing for Final exams or inclasses	34	25%
Overcrowded lecture halls	40	29%
Indifferent attitudes of lectures	26	19%
Registration procedures	112	82%

The above table shows that the highest frequencies of academic stress on university students that were reported on registration procedures (112) followed by financial burdens (96), inadequate material (80) and the least source of academic stress was high competition from other students (12).

4. 4 What are the academic stressors faced by MSU university students?

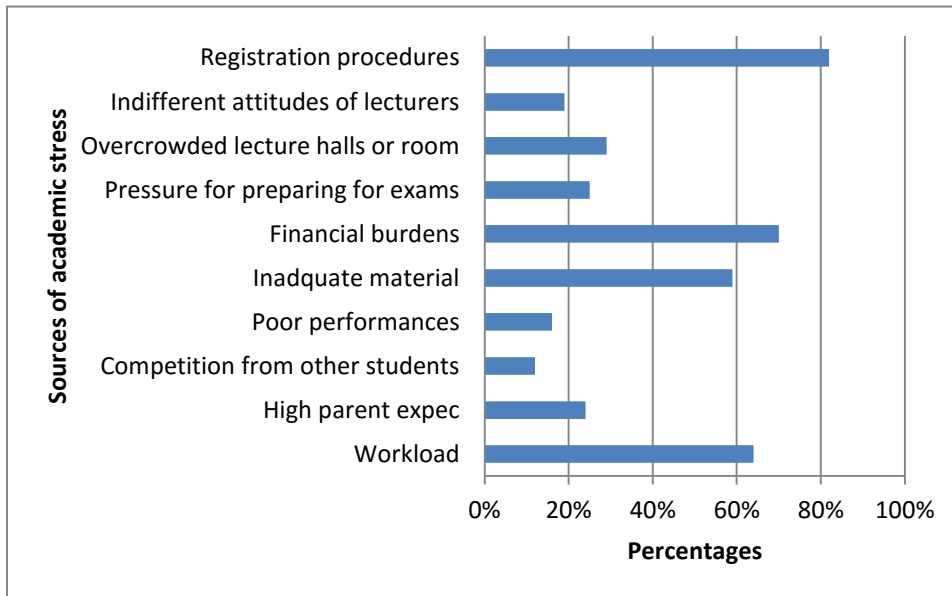


Fig 2

The mostly frequently reported four source of academic stress are registration procedures with 112 respondents (82%), followed by financial burdens with 96 respondents (70%), workload with 87 respondents (64%) and the least frequently reported academic stressors are poor performances with 22 respondents (16%) and completion from other students 16 respondents (12%).

4.5 Research Question 3 :Do these coping strategies differ by gender?

Table 5

Coping strategies by gender.

Gender		Avoidanc e	Distancin g	Social Support	Planful	Religious	Emotiona l
Female	N	70	70	70	70	70	70
	Std. Deviation	4.284	2.646	3.049	2.821	2.821	2.847
	Mean	7.35	8.27	9.35	8.64	8.83	6.74
Male	N	66	66	66	66	66	66
	Std. Deviation	4.051	2.885	2.569	1.991	2.255	2.055
	Mean	7.47	7.92	7.28	8.14	5.53	5.15
Total	N	136	136	136	136	136	136
	Std. Deviation	4.159	2.776	2.958	2.493	2.569	2.517

The results from the above table show that coping strategies differ by gender in coping with academic stress. Male students use avoidance strategies with a mean of 7, 47 more than female students with a mean of 7.35. Distancing coping strategies were used more frequently by male students with a mean of 7.92 whilst female students have a mean of 8.27. Also, female students use social support with a mean of 9, 35 more than male students with a mean of 7.28. The results revealed that female students use less planful coping strategies with a mean of 9.11 than male counterparts (8.64 mean). Religious coping strategies were used more by female students (8.83 mean) than by male counterparts (5.53 mean). It is also noted from the above table that male students with a mean of 6.74 used emotional coping strategies less than female students with a mean of 5.15.

4.6 Do these coping strategies differ by academic level?

Table 6

Academic level		Avoidanc e	Distancin g	Social Support	Planful	Religiou s	Emotiona l
1.2	N	22	22	22	22	22	22
	Std. Deviation	5.064	3.333	2.569	2.943	2.943	3.031
	Mean	8.45	9.00	6.61	8.30	8.30	9.30
2.1	N	20	20	20	20	20	20
	Std. Deviation	4.501	3.434	2.269	2.250	2.250	2.638
	Mean	6.83	7.96	10.17	8.52	8.52	8.83
2.2	N	23	23	23	23	23	23
	Std. Deviation	3.393	2.495	3.626	1.855	1.855	2.289
	Mean	6.55	8.00	10.41	8.73	8.73	7.86
4.1	N	22	22	22	22	22	22
	Std. Deviation	4.469	1.414	2.557	1.162	1.162	1.781
	Mean	6.65	6.09	9.09	8.30	8.30	4.96
4.2	N	23	23	23	23	23	23
	Std. Deviation	2.124	2.234	3.813	3.052	3.052	2.011
	Mean	6.73	7.92	7.43	8.42	8.83	6.55
Total	N	26	26	26	26	26	26
	Std. Deviation	4.712	1.918	2.800	3.141	3.141	1.949
	Mean	5.35	7.02	10.61	8.83	8.88	5.04
Total	N	136	136	136	136	136	136
	Std. Deviation	4.159	2.776	3.058	2.569	2.569	3.091

Table 6 shows the information pertaining to research number 4 as indicated above. The table above uses means to show the differences between academic levels in coping with academic stress. The results show that coping strategies differ by academic level, level 1.1 students used

avoidance coping strategies with the highest mean of 8.45 compared to other academic levels, followed by 1.2 with a mean of 6.83 whilst 4.2 students show that they use less frequently avoidance coping strategies with a mean of 5.35. The results in table 6 also show that level 1.1 were dominant users of distancing coping strategies than the other students in the other levels with a mean of 9.00 compared to 1.2 students with a mean of 7.96 whilst the level 4.2 reported the smallest mean (7.02) than any other academic levels.

Level 4.2 showed that they use social support more than other academic levels with a total mean of 10.61 followed by level 1.2 with a mean of 10.17 and level 2.2 students with a mean of 9.09. However the results also show that level 1.1 use less social support (6.61) than any other academic levels. The results also depict that level 4.2 use planful problem coping strategies than the other 5 academic levels with a mean of 8.83, followed by level 4.1 with a mean of 8.42, whilst level 1.1 and 2.2 students reported the lowest mean of 8.30 compared to other levels. The level 4.2 students reported using religious coping strategies (8.88) than any other academic levels with the level 1.1 recorded the least mean level on religious coping strategies with academic stress.

From the above table 5 the results show that use emotional coping strategies were used more frequently by first year students (level 1.1 mean of 9.30 and level 1.2 a mean of 9.88). First year students reported using more of emotional coping strategies than any other levels (level 1.1, 9.30 mean and level 1.2 a mean of 8.83).

4.6.1 Null Hypothesis

- H₀: There is a significance difference between stressors and coping strategies.

To test the aforementioned hypothesis, ANOVA was used.

Table.7 Analysis of variance (ANOVA) :Sources of academic stress and coping strategies.

Coping strategy	F	Sig
Avoidance	.862	.561
Distancing	1.113	.359
Social support	.946	.488
Planful	.329	.934
Religious	.329	.964
Emotional	1.633	.113

No significant differences between sources of academic stress and coping strategies because on avoidance $f=0.862$ and $sig.=0.561$, on distancing $f=1.113$ and $sig=0.359$, on social support $f=0.946$ and $sig 0.488$, on planful problem coping $f=0.329$ and $sig =0.934$, on religious $f=0.329$ and $sig 0.964$ and emotional coping $f=1.633$ and $sig 0.113$. There the null hypothesis is rejected

4.7 Conclusion

This chapter focused on the presentation, analysis and interpretation of data obtained on coping strategies to cope with academic stress.

CHAPTER 5

DISCUSSIONS, RECOMMENDATIONS AND CONCLUSIONS

5.1 INTRODUCTION

This chapter presents the discussions of the findings of the study in accordance to the four objectives of the study and hypothesis of the study. The chapter also gives conclusions and recommendations to the study.

5.2 Discussions of Results

What are the coping strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress?

The first research question focused on the strategies used by students to cope with academic stress. Most students engaged in social support coping (mean 10,61) and students might have resorted to social support such as talking to friends and relatives because of the rapid increase in technological advancement thus sharing problems on chats such as whats up, Facebook or Skype and so on. This is in line with Lazarus and Folkman (1984) who state social support as one of the most effective coping strategy to cope with stressful situations. The study revealed that students used social support informs of talking to friends as a way to deal with stress, thus this was similar to the findings of Redhwan et al (2009) at Monash University in Malaysia. However, emotional strategies were the least used and this might be because individuals might vent emotions at the moment the individual might be stressed rather than solving the stressful situation at hand (Lazarus and Folkman 1984). Avoidance coping strategies (mean 7,35) were also used less frequently, however these findings contradict with Guthrie et al (1995) cited in Yousuff et al (2010) who purport that dental medical students used avoidance coping strategies more frequently than other coping strategies.

The use of different strategies to cope with academic stress may be supported by Lazarus and Folkman (1984)'s transactional model that comprises of the two broad categories emotion

focused coping strategies and problem focused coping strategies that are used by individuals in the face of stressful situations.

Sources of academic stress faced by MSU students?

The second research question focused on identifying the sources of academic stress encountered by Midlands State University students. The study revealed registration procedures (80%) as the greatest source of academic stress and this might be because of the registration rules and regulations of the university for an unregistered individual to access resources such library books, attendance of lectures or even deferring the semester. The findings also suggest financial (70%) burdens as stressful and this is consistent with (Kasayira et al 2007; Ongori and Agolla 2007). Financial burdens may be exacerbated by current economic hardships being faced in Zimbabwe in which there is less free circulation of money to sustain the people's lives hence affecting other spheres of life. Workload (64%) is one of the greatest sources of academic stress, this finding is consistent with previous studies (Fairbrother and Warn 2003, Polychronopoulou and Divaris, 2005; Ongori and Agolla, 2008; Agolla and Ongori 2008).

Students rated inadequate material to do assignments (59%) as stressful academic source. This might be caused by insufficient resources, which could to meet their targets or needs. Similarly, Misra and Mckean 2000; Awino and Agolla 2008) 's research findings purported that. The findings also purport overcrowded lecture halls (29%) as a source of academic stress, this might be because of increases in enrollments by the university without taking considerations of carrying capacities of the lecture rooms and halls available. According to Ongori and Agolla students rated overcrowded lecture halls as stressful, since the students had to take lectures whilst standing due to shortages of seats or accommodation.

Students regarded pressure for preparing for final exams and inclasses (29%) as a stressful academic source. Similar findings were depicted by Ongori and Agolla 2009; Kasayira et al 2007). Indifferent attitudes (19%) were seen as one of the least causing academic source, of which this was consistent with studies by Murphy and Archer 1996; Ongori 2009; Agolla; 2009). This shows that there is existence of mutual relationships between the lecturers and students,

which makes the learning environment conducive thus creating good relationships. The least sources of academic stress was competition from other students (12%) and high parent expectations (24%) and this was similar with studies by (Fairbrother and Warn 2003; Leroy 1988).

Differences in coping strategies by Gender

This study found out that coping strategies differ by gender; female students used social support more than male students. According to Taylor (2007) women provide social support to others and are more engaged in their social support networks and research evidence suggest that gender differences in social support stem from the biological differences in men and women when they respond to stressful situations. More so female students resorted to emotional coping strategies than male students did and this might be because of the different biological make-ups, men internalize their emotions when they encounter stressful situations whilst women vent out emotions under stressful situations. Thus, this might cause males to be engaged in avoidance and distancing coping strategies, more than women do. Parrel findings revealed by a study at the Middle East University in Turkey suggested that female students did not differ in their academic stress coping strategies ([http:// web.deu. edu.tr/baed](http://web.deu.edu.tr/baed)).

It is also important to note that age also plays a pivotal role in the selection of coping strategies one can use when facing academic stress. More to this, human diversity in the form of different social background, cultures and ethnic might also influence individuals' coping strategies when facing stressful events in life, thus these factors are also great determinants in what coping strategies university students can use despite their gender status.

Moreso, the theories of cognitive transactional, hardiness, social support and model of coping modes may support how individuals deal with stressful situations because of the ways they perceive and appraise different situations, availability of resources within individuals and different personalities individuals possess despite their gender.

Coping strategies differences by academic level

Students in the 4th year reported using planful problem coping strategies than the other levels and this might be due to the maturity and experience they would have gained over the past years in

dealing with stressful situations as university students. However, first year (1.1) students engaged more in distancing coping strategies and avoidance coping strategies compared to other levels when they face academic stress and this might be due to lack of knowledge on avoidance coping strategies' dilabitating effects to their health. In addition, avoidance coping strategies may leave a high probability of a recurrence of a stressful situation as they might not totally eradicate it and the Cognitive transactional theory and the Model of coping modes support this. This shows that there is need for them to get counseling (Kasayira et al 2007). The theories of Social support and Cognitive transactional support the significance of social support in coping with stressful situations; this in line with the findings that level 4.2 students used social support. Also level 4.2 used social support than the other academic levels and this might show that social support coping strategies are very vital to students within the final stages as they help individuals to acquire more knowledge that help them to solve problems effectively, thus showing a sense of maturity in them. The use of social support coping strategies was similar to a research carried out the University of Murdoch in Australia on 4th and 5th year vertinary students in which 5th year students used social support more often than their counterparts (Williams 2005).

Level 1.1 were dominant users of emotional coping strategies and this might be due to lack of good time management skills, the hefty pressure of the university demands and immense pressure which might have been exacerbated by different sources of academic stress. However, these findings were parrell to a study carried out by Mudhozvi (2012) on first year students at a university in Zimbabwe in which self-efficacious beliefs and social support coping strategies were used to cope with academic stress when adjusting to the university demands. It is important to know that however, despite using different coping strategies at different levels individual personalities and attitudes towards stressful situations play a pivotal role in coping with academic stress.

Hypothesis-There is a significance difference between academic stressors and coping strategies.

The results of the study show that there is no significance difference between academic stress and coping strategies, so the null hypothesis was rejected. Parallel findings, revealed that

academic workload encountered by students was perceived as having a positive relationship with practical coping strategies and negative relationship with distractive coping strategies and avoidance coping used by students according to a study carried out by Redhwan et al (2009) Malaysian medical students .

5.3 Conclusions of the discussions of the results

The most used coping strategy used was social support. Students used this through communication to cope with academic stress and which shows it is effective or dominantly used.

The most common source of academic stress is registration procedures. This shows registration procedures pose complications to the students that pose a hefty of academic stress than any other academic stressors.

Academic stress is a rampant phenomenon among university students which need students to use counter productive coping strategies despite their gender and academic levels such as social support, planful problem coping and religious coping strategies.

Based on the findings male students can be regarded as dominant users of avoidant and distancing coping strategies compared to female students who use emotional and social support coping more than male students do.

There are no differences between sources of academic stress and strategies adopted to cope with academic stress by MSU students.

Overall, the research findings have depicted students need strategies to cope with academic stress and academic levels and gender have a part to play in students 'coping strategies when facing academic stress.

5.4 Recommendations.

The University Counselling department should create platforms such as public lectures where students from various faculties would gain knowledge about how to cope with academic stress from the counselling department and even invite experienced or professional counsellors hence

this will make students aware of the importance of getting counselling when facing academic stress or even other stressful situations.

The University should also engage departments such as the Psychology to help students to deal or cope with academic stress. The University should engage in partnerships with registered psychologists to train Psychology lectures so that they would help students to get counselling at freewill increasing professional counsellors at the university.

Seminars with High School students focusing on the university demands and importance of counselling and how to cope with academic stress should be done so as to help the students gain knowledge on how to adapt to the university life so that they would be aware of how to cope counter productively when facing academic stress.

During orientation of first year students, students should be involved in question and answer sessions with the university counseling department so that they would know where to get professional counseling when they face stressful situations and this help them to quickly know that the university as provide such services. The sessions should include equipping the students with good time management skills, planful problem techniques and adjustment skills to the university environment.

As the university's enrollment is increasing each year, the university should build more lecture halls and rooms to allow a proportionate number of the students enrolled and the infrasture available to avoid overcrowded lecture halls that pose academic stress.

Further researches on topics such as perception of students on academic stress and effects of academic stress should be carried out by the university so that this would help the university administrators to review and strengthen the measures in existsistance and initiatives towards curbing academic stress among students.

5.5 Conclusion

The chapter focused on discussing the research out of the questionnaire in relation to relevant literature review. Conclusions and recommendations were depicted to the University in order to aid students.

Midlands State University

Established 2000

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FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Date...1-10-2013

To whom it may concern

Dear Sir/Madam

RE: REQUEST FOR ASSISTANCE WITH DISSERTATION INFORMATION
FOR TAWANDA. D. MACHEMEDZE REG NO R10678W.
BACHELOR OF PSYCHOLOGY HONOURS DEGREE

This letter serves to introduce to you the above named student; studying for a Psychology Honours Degree and is in his 4th year. All Midlands State University Students are required to do research in their fourth year of study. We therefore kindly request your organisation to assist the above-mentioned student with any information that they require to do their dissertation.

Topic : Strategies used by Midlands State University Students to Cope with Academic Stress.

For more information regarding the above, feel free contact the Department

Yours faithfully

F. Ngwenya
Chairperson



Midlands State University



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GWERU

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Fax: (263) 54 260233/260311

FACULTY OF SOCIAL SCIENCES
DEPARTMENT OF PSYCHOLOGY

Dear Sir/Madam

RE : APPLICATION LETTER FOR THE PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A RESEARCH AT
MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY.

I am Tawanda David Machededze , a 4th year student at Midlands State University studying for a Bsc Honours in Psychology .I do hereby apply for the permission to undertake my study research on " Strategies used by Midlands State University students to cope with academic stress" in partial fulfillment of the requirements of the Bsc Honours in Psychology. The information gathered will be treated with strict confidentiality for academic purposes. Your assistance is greatly appreciated.

Thank you in anticipation

Yours Faithfully

Tawanda D Machededze

Approved

MIDLANDS STATE UNIVERSITY
ADMISSIONS OFFICE

07 OCT 2013

PRIVATE BAG 9055, GWERU
TEL: 054 - 260417

Appendix 3

Research Questionnaire

Topic: Strategies used by university students to cope with academic stress at Midlands State University.

The researcher Tawanda Machededze is a fourth year Psychology student at Midlands States University conducting a research in your area (Midlands State University). This is in partial fulfillment of BSc Psychology Honours Degree that I m currently undertaking. Could you please spare your precious time to fill this questionnaire? The information acquired from this research will be used for academic purposes and will be treated with confidentiality. I deeply appreciate your co-operation and support.

Instructions.

- Do not write personal details not asked for e.g. names addresses or phone number
- Put an X where appropriate.
- Please answer all questions.

Section A

Demographic Data

Gender Female ()

Male ()

Academic Level 1.1 () 1.2 () 2.1 () 2.2 () 4.1 () 4.2 ()

Section B

For each statement below indicate with an (X) what strategy you use to cope with academic stress during the semester on scale (1) always (2) often , (3) sometimes,(4)rarely,(5) never.

	1	2	3	4	5
1. I make light of the situation and refuse to get too serious about it.					
2. I try to forget about the stressful work (assignments or presentations etc.)					
3. I try the stress not to get into me, refusing not to think about.					
4. I look for the silver lining, so to speak and try to look on the bright side of the thing.					
5. I sleep more than usual.					
6. I try to make myself feel better by drinking, smoking or use of drugs.					
7. I avoid the stressful situation or work by not doing it.					
8. I bunk le ctures more and more.					
9. I ask for advice or support from others.					
10. I discuss my workload and pressure or ask help from supervisors.					
11. I express my feelings, talk about things and for advice or support from friends, family or peers.					
12. I seek for professional help from within the university.					
13. I break the problem into smaller sections to make it easier for me.					
14.I use the internet or the library to search for related information.					
15.I try to inspire myself by doing something creative, have self-					

confidence and an optimistic mind.					
16.I draw solutions from past experience, in a similar situation.					
17. I look for comfort in a belief or power greater than myself.					
18.I regularly attend a place of worship					
19. I listen to gospel music that comforts me when stressed.					
20.I take the Bible and read when stressed.					
21.I give up and blame God for being unfair when I face stress.					
22.I put my anger or fretful emotions on other students.					
23.I do usual things such as watching TV, listening to music, sleeping or going out to temporarily forget frustrating things.					
24.I consider it to be a self-challenge.					

Section C

What academic stressors do you face during the semester? (You can tick more than one box but not more than three)

- Workload
- High parent expectation
- Competition from other students
- Poor performance
- Inadequate material to do assign
- Financial burdens
- Pressure for preparing for final exams or in classes
- Overcrowded lecture halls or lecture rooms
- Indifferent attitudes of lecturers
- Registration procedures.

THANK YOU

Appendix 4

Department of Psychology

Research Project

Supervisor audit sheet

Date	Activity/Chapter	Lecturer's signature	Student's Signature	

Supervisor's Signature

Date

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