

---

## THE IMPACT OF STRESS ON ACADEMIC ACHIEVEMENT

SULEIMAN LAWAL

---

Department of Education,  
Usmanu Danfodiyo University,  
P.M.B. 2346, Sokoto – Nigeria.

### ABSTRACT

*This paper examined the impact of stress on academic achievement. Stress has become a common health problem. Several recent illnesses have been attributed to stress. The writer defined the concept stress, gave it sources and highlighted on the major symptoms of stress. The writer went on to highlight the real impact of stress on academic achievement, where the discussed about, how stress bring about poor study habit, lack of concentration, poor memory, fear of test/examination and hate for the study. Strategies and techniques of managing stress were also discussed. Lastly conclusion and recommendations were drawn by the writer.*

### Introduction

Stress is a common phenomenon in every society and it forms a part of everybody living. However, excessive stress is bad. Stress is common in both elementary, secondary and advanced level schools. Iwuji {1990} among many writers stated that the association between the amount of stress a body accumulates at a given period of time and probability of mental or physical breakdown. Also Napoli, Kilbride & Tebbs {1982} pointed out that unresolved stress can be dangerous to health.

Akinnusi {1995} also noted that the incidence of stress at home, at work, at school and Nigerian society at large is alarming due to the fact harsh economic realities, poor social relations, poor infrastructural facilities, institutional allocation delays and breakdown and overall pervasive feeling of precariousness of life are not certain. Hilgard, Atkinson & Atkison {1979} who although held the opinion that some stress is necessary for normal functioning and that the nervous system needs a certain amount of stimulation to function properly, cautioned that stress that is too intense or prolonged can have destructive physiological and psychological effect.

However, stress is not only disturbing. It is also destroying. Stress and anxiety among students of institutions of higher learning give a great concern, when we look at things obtainable in the school, like poor facilities for study, squalid surroundings, prolonged and reported strikes. These brought about a feeling of depression and apathy in university students. It was observed that these problems have compelled students to take to irrational diversions like belonging to secret cults or imbibing the culture and other forms of hedonism.

Stress phenomenon is increasingly becoming a major issue of discussion among psychologists and counselors. This is in view of the impact stress is having on our lives. Stress has great impact on academic achievements of students/pupils. Some elements of stress are important in the life of an individual to motivate one to work hard during academic pursuance, stress energises us as we prepare to face an academic task. Everyone needs a certain level of stress sometimes to spur him/her to act in a manner that leads to achievement. Stress can also become destructive; it can turn into distress and sap one's energy when it sets in, it brings about poor study habit, diversion of concentration on academic work, poor memory, slow reading habit and decline on initiatives which will consequently affect academic achievement in school.

#### Stress Defined

The term stress is difficult to define despite that fact that everybody has it and talks about it. Stress, therefore, means different things to different people and stressful situations are based on individual appraisal and interpretations. Some situations are more stressful than the others. Denga {1986} defined stress as the generalized nonspecific response of the body to any demand made on it. To Masha and Ndubusi {1993} stress is any action or situation which places physical or physiological demands on a person which can create imbalance in him.

Wingate {1972} defined stress as any influence which disturbs the natural equilibrium of the body including physical injury, exposure, deprivation and emotional disturbance. MaNermey {1974} viewed stress as the body's physical and chemical reactions to circumstances that frighten, excite, confuse, endanger or irritate an individual. Anyanwu {2001} defined stress as a force which undoubtedly affects the health status and development of an individual. Mclangin, Cormier & Cormier {1988} defined stress as any situation or event which troubles, bothers, upset or disturbs a person in his/her daily living.

## Sources of Stress

Going by the views and definitions of stress proffered by educationist, it will become clearer that so many situations occur in our lives that lead to stress. Iwuji {1990} pointed out that man has unlimited sources of stress in both his internal and external environment. Each of the man's five senses are stress provoking. She explained further that the sources of man's stress could be physical such as sight of a snake, or psychological such as a feeling of frustration, it could be internal like an attack of virus or external like a loud noise or a strong offensive odour. In organizations, monotony, a blocked career, overloading of responsibility, ambiguous demands, value conflicts, interpersonal conflicts and family crises are potential sources of stress to employees.

Bello {1996} opined that stress is an inevitable aspect of human existence that can safely asserts that to live is to experience stress. Human experiences, mild or serious, pleasant or aversive, are to some extent stress producing. People undergo stressful experiences at home work, at workplace, on the way or road and even at recreational places. Both negative and positive stressors can lead to stress. Some common categories and examples of stressors include:

Sensory: pain and bright light

Life events: birth and death, marriage and divorce.

Responsibility: lack of money and unemployment

illness: depression and obsessive compulsive disorder.

Work/study: exams/test, project deadline and group projects.

Personal relationships: Conflicts, deceptions and break-up.

Environmental: lack of control over environmental circumstances, such as food, housing, health, freedom or mobility.

Social: Struggles with con-specific individuals and social defeat can be potent sources of chronic stresses.

Adverse experience during development: e.g. Prenatal exposure to materials stress, poor attachment histories, sexual abuse.

## Symptoms of Stress

Denga {1986} stated that decreased and sexual processes, onset of disease such as common cold, back pains, diarrhea and compulsive eating not related to physiological hunger are all symptoms of stress. Amadi {1999} maintained that, sometimes in our lives we experience that the body no longer feels like it used to. We may feel tightness of the

throat, sweaty palms, aching head, fatigue, a vague uneasiness etc. These signs may be telling us that we are distressed. Frequent headaches may be a sign of mental overloading; aching shoulders may be sign of carrying too much burden that calls for relocations in order to loosen up.

Tubesing {1981} opined that we should listen to ourselves, when we discover that we are more tired, depressed, frustrated or restless than usual, if our relationships are no longer satisfying, the body weight goes up or comes down dramatically. These may mean that we are experiencing much or too little stress.

### **The Impact of Stress on Academic Achievements**

According to Cambridge International Dictionary of English {2003}, academic is defined as, relating to schools, colleges and universities or connected with studying and thinking, not with practical skills. Also, Cambridge International Dictionary of English {2003} defined, achievement as, to succeed in finishing something or reaching an aim, especially after a lot of work.

Academic achievement from the meaning of the two terms means to succeed in finishing an educational task or reaching an educational aim after studying for a period of time.

The work will now shift to the real impact of stress on academic achievement.

Tension in the home, family discord, family instability etc; all these cumulatively produce stress in the family members. This in practical terms also refers to the relationship between husband and wife, parents and children, and between sibling and the resultant conflicts especially those between husband and wives. So we could have a continuum from frequent quarrels through serious antagonism to completely broken homes. These will directly affect the emotion of the children and can be most disruptive of the level of their concentration and learning in school as well as their study habit. Thus, the academic achievement is affected.

Family discipline is an important factor associated with the socialization and eventual achievement of children in school. Discipline at home could be authoritarian, permissive or democratic. Harsh and authoritarian discipline produces a child that is passive, insecure, un-inquisitive, and lacking in initiative and study habit as well as concentration on academic task. These produce stress in students/pupils by making him/her to be nervous, being upset, have vague uneasiness and disturbing thought, which consequently affect the academic achievement of the learner.



The location of school is an important factor that could affect learning and academic achievement. When schools are located in a noisy environment, disagreeable sound of various kinds of vehicles from the roads and the streets, and of machinery from factories and industries are among the common stress to the urban and industrial man as well as the occupiers of the school within the immediacy. The attention and concentration of learners will be diverted by the stressors, which will negatively affect learning and academic achievement.

Teachers are poorly or inadequately remunerated in Nigerian schools. A poorly paid or unpaid teacher is always in stress because his devotions, concentration and directions will be diverted, the teachers will perform poorly in class and portray aggressive behaviors. The effect of stress on the teacher could result in disrupting teaching/learning activities and cumulatively lead to academic under achievement in learners.

When society is believed with social upheavals, like ethnic conflicts and political instability, stress will develop among the members of the society. Learners will be in stress, because they would be predisposed to frequent break-downs that would not allow them to concentrate maximally on their academic pursuit and consequently make them underachievers academically.

Non-availability of financial resources in family could produce stress among the family members, also the children in that family will not be left out. To augment their family income, children from such homes are often made to be in a stressful situation by engaging in petty trading, being conductors of buses, and hawking merchandise at the expense of their studies. The perception, conception, memory, reasoning and creativity among learners will be crippled.

Iwuji {1990} stated that living seems synonymous with stress and that man needs a reasonable amount of stress to survive and actualize himself in his environment. For instance, it is reported that optimum stress levels can improve concentration, prolong endurance, build strength and reduce errors. Going by the view of Iwuji, one would conclude that stress at optimum level spur up learners to work harder and achieve something tangible after studying.

## **Managing Stress**

Izerbigie {1999} viewed stress management as an approach that uses a large range of techniques and intervention in a systematic manner to prevent or reduce stress and stress related symptoms in individuals and organizations. However, this paper will adopt a general approach to stress management used by Izerbigie.

- a. Time management
- b. Therapy highlights
- c. Creative personal problem solving

**a. Time management:** The key to controlling external stresses is to control or avoid particular stressors and learn to cope with those that can not be controlled or avoided. Get your priorities right on the principles of first thing first, choose alternative goals when you can not reach a goal, do not procrastinate, delegate authority, break a large task down in to smaller parts etc, are ways of managing stress.

**b. Therapy highlights:** Create stability zones at work or school that you can use to wind, relax, socialize, or take your mind off job. This takes the following forms, recreate or exercise, meditation or relaxation method, and lastly the use of mean blood pressure techniques.

**c. Creative personal problems solving:** As it may be difficult to leads a stress-free life. One can try as much as possible to reduce knowing that his personality, perception of a situation and his interpretation of a specific situation are variable that can determine what stress one faced. It is not the degree of events that matter but our perceptions of the events. One can control important aspects of his stress response, like changing your thought from negative self talk to positive self talk, accept your personal worth and know your limitation.

## **Conclusion**

Stress is tied to everybody living and that there is no question of being free from them whether one is a child, an adult or an aged person. Stress put ones mind under strain and psychological pressure until the sources is removed.

The learners academic achievement has always being bedeviled by stress. Learners are always handicapped by stress, developing in them the following; poor study habit, lack of

concentration, poor memory, slow reading and fear of test/examination, which cumulatively make them underachievement academically.

Strategies and techniques were designed by counselors and psychologists on the management of stress. Man is threaten by stressors in every sphere of his existence, the chances of his personal development significantly depends on his ability to effectively handle stressful situations.

### **Recommendations**

Following the findings of this study, the recommendation as here under are deemed pertinent.

Parents and family members should always try not to allow their family instability and discord, which always culminate to stress, to affect the educational performance and achievement of their children.

Family members should not be authoritative, harsh and permissive in discipline, so as not to make their children always passive, insecure, un-inquisitive and passive as well as having poor memory and lack of concentration on their studies.

Teachers in stressful situation, such as poor remuneration, should not always allow their conditions to interfere with their delivery of knowledge in the classroom; they should try to give the best to the learners.

School should not be close to places like roads, markets, airports, and motor parks etc, which always produce stress provoking noises.

### **References**

- Akinnusi, M. (1995): "Stress among a sample of bank executive in Nigeria", *Journal of management in Nigeria*, 3 (5): 5 - 14.
- Amadi, V. A. (1999): "coping with stress for human capacity utilization," *the counselor*, 17 (2): 113 - 119.
- Anyanwu, R. {2001}: "Nutrition in stress Management", *Guardian Newspaper*, March, 8<sup>th</sup>, Pp 323.

- Bello, R. M. (1996): "Managing stress through the factors influencing its intensity, "paper presented at a conference on counseling against stress and emotional disorder organized by the counseling association of Nigerian {CASSON}, at Uyo.
- Cambridge International Dictionary of English, (2003): Cambridge, Cambridge University Press.
- Denga, D. I. (1986): *Guidance and counseling in school and non school settings*, Calabar: centaur press limited.
- Hilgard, R. E.; Atkinson, E. L. & Atkinson, L. C. (1979): *Introduction to psychology*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich Inc.
- Iwuji, V. B. C. (1990): "Stress and modern living: How to cope with excessive stress" *Journal of Research in Counseling Psychology*, 2 (1): 1 - 9.
- Izerbigie, T. I. (1999): "A pluralistic approach to stress management by indigenous Binis: issues and strategies", *African journal of education*, 4 (1): 58 - 73.
- MaNermeiy, W. (1974): "Learning to live successfully in today's world, *stress*, 25 (1): 110 - 120.
- Masha, G. I. & Ndubusi, M. (1993): "Stress factors among Nigerian workers, sources, manifestation and management", paper presented on counseling for healthy living at the university of Abuja forum.
- Mclagin, L.; Cormier, C. & Corner, M. (1998): "Relationship between coping strategies and distress", *Counseling psychology*, 35 (21): 187 -193.
- Napoli, V.; Kilbridge, J. M. & Tebbs, D. E. (1982): *Adjustment and Growth in changing world*, New York: West Publishing Company.
- Tubesing, D. A. (1981): *Kicking your stress habit*, Minnesota: whole person associate Inc.
- Wingate, P. (1972): *The Penguin Medical Encyclopedia*, Harmond Sworth: Penguin Books Limited.