



*Stress Management and Coping Mechanism Through ... Lawali, M. K. (2025)*

## **Stress Management and Coping Mechanism through Health Education at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State, Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*The paper examines stress management and coping mechanism through health education at tertiary level of education in Zamfara state, Nigeria. The aim of the paper is to identify the strategies, procedures for stress management and coping mechanisms through health education in Zamfara state. In order to achieve this aim therefore, the paper review related literature such as introduction that provide a brief caption of what the paper is all about, the concept of health education as a process of enlighten peoples about their health in physical, mental, emotional and psychological wellbeing through health advocacy, sensitization and awareness, stress and it types such as acute and chronic stress. Biological need for stress equilibrium, signs and causes of stress, stress management techniques and stress coping mechanisms as well as healthy ways to cope with stress, roles of health education in stress management were discussed. Meanwhile, the paper recommended some of the following suggestions, Health education should be given priority through enlightenment and advocacy on stress management strategies and coping mechanism as well as pros and cons involve towards mitigating self-care when dealing with difficult stress situations. Individuals should be enlightened through health education to developed and adopt the spirit of engaging in an exercise thereby securing at least hour and a quarter (1:15 minutes) per week could help to reduce the risk of early death, cardiovascular diseases, stroke and cancer.*

**Keywords:** Health Education, Stress management.

### **Introduction**

The level of diseases among the people in a community is mostly due to their cultural, social behavior and life style. The control of the occurrence of these diseases, therefore depends on the health education intervention strategies that may lead to positive change in health behavior and life style, meanwhile emphasizes is raised on the expansion of health facilities, the regular training of medical and health personnel without giving adequate consideration to health education in order to create awareness, advocacy and sensitization programme on the need for change in health related behavior from detrimental life styles that affects both personal and community hygiene. The aim therefore, is



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the attainment of minimal health incidence of illness. In this regard health education becomes an appropriate alternative and panacea for the improvement of community and individual health behavior. Health education is an essential phenomena in developing countries for creation of awareness to individuals, families, groups and communities on the importance associated to healthcare, reduce family wastage and create a sense of self reliance on healthy living, population control, helping individuals, families, groups and communities to recognize those harmful habits, beliefs, customs and aspirations that are detrimental to health and improve people health, knowledge, attitude and practice towards healthy life style (Leubner & Hinterberger, 2017).

### **Concept of Health Education at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

Health education is a profession of educating people about health (McKenzie, et al 2009). Areas within this profession encompass environmental health, physical health, social health, emotional health, intellectual health, spiritual health, sexual and reproductive health education (Donatelle, 2009). It can also be defined as any combination of learning activities that aim to assist individuals and communities to improve their health by expanding knowledge or altering attitudes toward health. Health education has been defined differently by various sources. The National Conference on Preventive Medicine in 1975 defined it as a process that informs, motivates and helps people to adopt and maintain healthy practices and lifestyles, advocates on environmental changes as needed to facilitate this goal and conducts professional training and research to the same end (UNESCO, 2018). Joint Committee on Terminology, (2001) defined Health Education as any combination of planned learning experiences based on sound theories that provide individuals, groups and communities the opportunity to acquire information and the skills needed to make quality health decisions. Health Education can also be defined as a process consisting of consciously constructed opportunities for learning involving some form of communication designed to improve health literacy and develop life skills which are conducive to individual and community health.

### **Concept of Stress at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

Stress is a feeling of emotional or physical tension. It can come from any event or thought that makes you feel frustrated or angry. Stress is body's reaction to a challenge or demand while stress can be positive such as when it helps you avoid danger or meet a deadline. But when stress lasts for a long time, it may harm your health.

Shadiya, (2015), Outline two main types of stress as follows:

**i. Acute Stress:** This is short term stress that goes away quickly. You feel it when you slam on the brakes, have a fight with your partner or ski down a steep slope. It helps you manage dangerous situations, it also occurs when you do something new or exciting and all people possess acute stress at one time or another.

**ii. Chronic Stress:** This is a stress that lasts for a longer period of time. You may have chronic stress if you have money problems, an unhappy marriage, trouble at work, or significant health concerns. Any type of stress that goes on for weeks or months is regarded as chronic stress. Individual can become so used to chronic stress without realizing it is a problem, if you don't find ways to manage stress it may lead to health problems of concern such as depression, brain diseases, hypertension to mention a few.

### **Stress and Your Body**

Your body reacts to stress by releasing hormones. These hormones make your brain more alert, cause your muscles to tense and increase your pulse. In short term, these reactions are good because they can help you handle the situation causing stress. Perhaps is your body way of protecting itself. When you have chronic stress your body stays alert even though there is no danger but over time



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this may put you at risk of health problems that including: high blood pressure, heart disease, depression, anxiety, menstrual problems among others and if you already have an existing health condition chronic stress can make it worse (Ahmad, et al, 2016).

### **Biological Need for Stress Equilibrium**

Homeostasis is a concept central to the idea of stress. Most biochemical processes strive to maintain equilibrium (homeostasis) a steady state that exists more as an ideal and less as an achievable condition. Environmental factors, internal or external stimuli continually disrupt homeostasis meanwhile an organism present condition is a state of constant flux moving about a homeostatic point that is organism optimal condition for living. Factors causing an organism condition to diverge too far from homeostasis can be experienced as stress. Life threatening situation such as major physical trauma or prolonged starvation can greatly disrupt homeostasis. On the other hand an organism attempt at restoring conditions back to or near homeostasis often consuming energy and natural resources can also be interpreted as stress.(Goldstein & Kopin, 2007).

### **Signs of Too Much Stress**

According to Carney, et al, (2022), Stress can cause many types of physical and emotional symptoms. Sometimes individual may not realize these symptoms are caused by stress. Here are some of the signs of stress such as forgetfulness, frequent aches and pains, headaches, lack of energy or focus, sexual problems, stiff jaw or neck, tiredness, trouble sleeping or sleeping too much, upset stomach, use of alcohol or medicines to relax, weight loss or gain to mention a few.

### **Causes of Stress**

The causes of stress are different for each individual where one can have stress from good challenges as well as bad ones. Some common sources of stress include Getting married or divorced, starting a new job, the death of a spouse or close family member, getting laid off, Retiring, having a baby, money problems, moving, having a serious illness, problems at work, problems at home (Ahmad, et al, 2016).

### **Stress Management at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

Stress management consist wide spectrum of techniques and psychotherapies aimed at controlling a person level of psychological stress especially chronic stress, generally for the purpose of improving the function of everyday life, stress produces numerous physical and mental symptoms which vary according to each individual situational factor. These can include a decline in physical health, such as headaches, chest pain, fatigue, sleep problem and depression. The process of stress management is a dilemma that can lead to a happy and successful life in modern society and these can solely depend on health education intervention programmes employed to suits for better improvement of health of the community such as health literacy, advocacy, sensitization, individual and community facilitation or involvement in provision of meaningful health outcome such as maintenance of environmental safety through afforestation to mitigate pollution and control erosion among others by community members for a better society. Stress management provides numerous ways to maintain overall wellbeing (Lehrer, et al, 2007).

### **Stress Management Techniques at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

There are several models of stress management each with distinctive explanations of mechanisms for controlling stress. Many stress management techniques cope with stresses peoples may find themselves. Some of the following ways listed help to reduce higher than usual stress levels temporarily or to compensate the biological issues involved and include the following.

**i. Exercise:** is a physical activity that enhances or maintains fitness and overall health which is performed for various reasons, including weight loss or maintenance, to aid growth and improve



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strength, develop muscles and the cardiovascular system, prevent injuries, hone athletic skills, improve health or simply for enjoyment (Kylasov & Gavrov, 2011). Many people choose to exercise outdoors where they can congregate in groups, socialize and improve wellbeing as well as mental health (Deslandes, et al, 2009). In terms of health benefits usually 150 minutes which is equivalent to two and half hours (2 ½) of moderate intensity exercise per week is recommended for reducing the risk of health problems such as diabetes, depression, hypertension etc. At the same time even doing a small amount of exercise is healthier than doing none. Only doing hour and a quarter (1:15 minutes/day) of exercise could reduce the risk of early death, cardiovascular disease, stroke and cancer (Garcia, et al, 2023).

**ii. Social Activity:** In social psychology an interpersonal relation (or interpersonal relationship) describes a social association, connection or affiliation between two or more people. It overlaps significantly with the concept of social relation which is the fundamental unit of analysis within the social sciences. Relations vary in degrees of intimacy, self-disclosure, duration, reciprocity, and power distribution (Jinhui & Xiaoting, 2020). The main trends of the interpersonal relations are family, kinship, friendship, love, marriage, business, employment, clubs, neighbourhood, ethical values, support and solidarity, Interpersonal relations may be regulated by law, custom, or mutual agreement and form the basis of social groups and societies. They appear when people communicate or act with each other within specific social contexts and they thrive on equitable and reciprocal compromises, meanwhile this form of interaction excessively help in managing tress level due to the intermingling nature existing between members of the community which can be adopted through health literacy and advocacy (Linda et al, 2007).

**iii. Hobby:** is considered to be a regular activity that is done for enjoyment typically during ones leisure time. Hobbies include collecting themed items and objects, engaging in creative and artistic pursuits, playing sports or pursuing other amusements or avocations all for the purpose to maintain wellbeing. Participation in hobbies encourages acquiring substantial skills and knowledge in that area and more importantly in health education because, during whatever process individuals might use their body parts to perform one or more task which in turn aid in development of muscles, intellectual ability, muscles strengthening which are very paramount in maintenance of personal wellbeing which is ultimate concern of health education. A list of hobbies changes with renewed interests and developing fashions by making it diverse and lengthy (Robert, 2015).

**iv. Meditation:** is a practice in which an individual uses a technique to train attention and awareness and detach from reflexive, discursive thinking, achieving a mentally clear and emotionally calm and stable state (Walsh & Shapiro, 2006).

**v. Relaxation Technique:** (known as relaxation training) is any method, process or activity that helps a person to relax and attain a state of increased calmness or otherwise reduce levels of pain, anxiety, stress or anger. Relaxation techniques are often employed as one element of a wider stress management program and can decrease muscle tension, lower blood pressure and slow heart and breath rates among other health benefits (Toussaint, et al, 2021).

**vi. Relaxation Therapy:** is the application of relaxation techniques in various settings to complement treatment for stress, anxiety, depression and pain. It addresses both psychological and physiological effects of stress such as increased heart rate, sweating and muscle tension. Whereas relaxation techniques may include progressive muscle relaxation, autogenic training, guided imagery, biofeedback assisted relaxation and other techniques (Toussaint, et al, 2021).

### **Stress Coping Mechanisms at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

According to Emad, & Gupta, (2023), Coping is defined as the thoughts and behavior mobilized to manage internal and external stressful situations. It is a term used distinctively for conscious



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and voluntary mobilization of acts, different from defense mechanisms that are subconscious or unconscious adaptive responses, both of which aim to reduce or tolerate stress. When individuals are subjected to a stressor the varying ways of dealing with it are termed coping styles which are a set of relatively stable traits that determine the individual behavior in response to stress. These are consistent over time and across situations. Coping is divided into reactive coping (a reaction following the stressor) and proactive coping (aiming to neutralize future stressors). Proactive individuals excel in stable environments because they are more routinized, rigid and are less reactive to stressors, while reactive individuals perform better in a more variable environment. Emad's further categorized coping style into four (4) main types:

- i. Problem focused:** Addresses the problem causing the distress. Examples of this style include active coping, planning, restraint coping and suppression of competing activities.
- ii. Emotion focused:** Aims to reduce the negative emotions associated with the problem. Examples of this style include positive reframing, acceptance, turning to religion, and humour.
- iii. Meaning focused:** An individual uses cognitive strategies to derive and manage the meaning of the situation
- iv. Social coping (support-seeking):** An individual reduces stress by seeking emotional or instrumental support from their community.

**Healthy Ways to Cope with Stress at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

According to Centre for disease control, (2024), learning to cope in a healthy way can help reduce your stress via health education panacea. Taking small steps in your daily life to manage stress can have a big impact and as well everyone manages stress differently. You can find and manage what triggers your stress and the right combination of healthy techniques that work for you.

**Take care of your mind.**

- i. Take breaks from news and social media. It's good to be informed but constant information about negative events can be upsetting.
- ii. Make time to unwind.
  - a. Take deep breaths, stretch or meditate.
  - b. Keep a journal.
  - c. Spend time outdoors either being active or relaxing.
  - d. Try to do some other relaxing activities you enjoy.
- iii. Practice gratitude daily. Remind yourself of specific things you are grateful for and write them down.
- iv. Connect with others.
  - a. Talk with people you trust about your concerns and how you are feeling.
  - b. Connect with your community based or faith based organizations.

**Take care of your body**

- i. Get enough sleep. Go to bed and wake up at the same time each day to help you sleep better. Adults need 7 or more hours per night.
- ii. Move more. Staying physically healthy can improve your emotional wellbeing. Every little bit of physical activity helps.
  - a. Start small and build up to 2 ½ hours a week.
  - b. Break it into smaller amounts such as 20 to 30 minutes a day.
- iii. Eat healthy. Have fruits and vegetables, lean protein, whole grains and low fat or no fat dairy. Limit foods with unhealthy fats, salt and added sugars.
- iv. Limit alcohol intake. Choose not to drink or drink in moderation. For example
  - a. Drinks twice or less a day for men.



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- b. Drink ones or less for women.
- c. Find out more at drink less will be the best.
- v. Avoid using illegal drugs or prescription drugs in ways other than prescribed and don't take someone else's prescription.
- vi. Avoid smoking and the use of other tobacco products.
- vii. Continue with regular health appointments, tests, screenings and vaccinations.

### **Roles of Health Education in Stress Management at Tertiary Level of Education in Zamfara State**

Health education play crucial roles in stress management at tertiary level of education in Zamfara state by providing knowledge, skills and support for individuals to effectively cope with stress and enhance their wellbeing. Health education informs people about the nature of stress, its impact on health and effective stress management techniques to be employed, among which include:

- i. Raising awareness:** Health education campaigns educate individuals about the physiological and psychological effects of stress on the body and mind.
- ii. Promoting healthy lifestyle choices:** Health education emphasizes the importance of activities such as exercise, healthy eating, sufficient sleep and mindfulness in reducing stress.
- iii. Teaching stress management techniques:** Health education programs teach practical skills such as exercise, relaxation techniques, time management, problem solving and assertive communication.
- iv. Facilitating self-care:** Health education encourages individuals to prioritize self-care activities that promote wellbeing and resilience, example adherence to health precautions.

### **Conclusion**

Learning to cope in a healthy way can help tremendously in reducing stress likewise the management of stress can have a significance impact in everyday life of individuals particularly in maintenance of homeostasis despite the fact that everyone manages stress differently. But you can find and manage what triggers your stress and the right combination of healthy techniques that work for you through health education. Health education informs people about the nature of stress, its impact on health and effective stress management techniques to be employed and if health education is properly adopted to ensure prevention of stress management by the community members and in all perspective of health-related issue therefore, stress and other health problems will be minimized or overcome.

### **Recommendations**

The paper recommended the following suggestions:

1. Individuals should employ the use of distinct techniques such as exercise, relaxation technique, hobby, social activities and meditation among so many others in stress Management.
2. Health education should be given priority through enlightenment and advocacy on stress management strategies and coping mechanism as well as pros and cons involves toward mitigating self-care when dealing with difficult stress situations.
3. Individuals should be enlightened through health education on how to developed and adopt the spirit of engaging in an exercise thereby securing at least hour and a quarter (1:15 minutes) per week could help to reduce the risk of early death, cardiovascular diseases, stroke and cancer.
4. Government should properly implement the policy that will make individuals in community to abstain from any forms of intoxicant that will gear stress level and hinder their well-being.



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5. Government, nongovernmental organizations and stakeholders should provide an avenue for health education intervention that will enhance a sustainable societal engagement in stress management activities.

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