

Chapter 3

Maladaptive Coping Mechanisms

Daniel Opotamutale Opotamutale

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-8913-056X>

University of Namibia, Namibia

Fillemon Shekutamba Albanus

 <https://orcid.org/0000-0003-1516-2523>

University of Namibia, Namibia

ABSTRACT

Mental health problems can affect many areas of students' lives, reducing their quality of life, academic achievement, physical health, and satisfaction with the college experience; as well as negatively impacting relationships with friends and family members. These issues can also have long-term consequences for students, affecting their future employment, earning potential and overall health. Stress is a commonly used concept in today's world due to the rapid advancements in almost everything (technologies and human evolution), and the world is becoming increasingly stressful. Unfortunately, students who struggle with depression and anxiety are reluctant to seek help. Higher education institutions can use the content of this chapter to develop appropriate targeted coping mechanisms and strategies which can be used by student counsellors to alleviate stressors among students thereby assisting in the enhancement of holistic health and wellness, and the academic excellence of students worldwide.

INTRODUCTION

Stress is a major mental health problem affecting university and college students globally. A minimal degree of stress and strains may not be a point of concern (Chang, 2017). However, if the student feels extreme stress before and during an examination, it is a point of concern for mental health. It is reported that, annually, 20% of students in the 18–24 age group commit suicide owing to examination-related stress, as well as less time to socialise and be involved in active relaxation activities which has a nega-

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tive effect of examination outcomes Go, (2016). Therefore, stress presents a serious threat to students' academic achievement.

Kwaah and Essilfe (2017) reported that coping mechanism are one of the necessary measures for preventing the harmful effects of prolonged stress. Moreover, coping mechanism is multidimensional and involve various strategies some of which are more functional than others (Kwaah & Essilfe, 2017). Students with poor coping mechanisms and personality types such as type A personality may be at risk of suffering additional stress, leading to negative patterns of behaviour, the development of psychosomatic symptoms and decreased academic performance (Akinici et al., 2018).

Preventing stress encompasses strategies that the student can undertake to reduce stress and its impact. Such strategies include aspects such as eating a well-balanced diet, avoiding the consumption of alcohol and related drug abuse, and enough sleep – at least eight hours a night is recommended (Bondarchuk et al., 2023). Furthermore, Bondarchuk et al., (2023) reported that exercising is one of the best strategies a student needs to consider when dealing stress as this will help to ease the body muscles, which becomes tense when one is stressed, by increasing blood circulation and thereby increasing the student's thinking capacity. Additionally, active study skills can help to ease stress by developing the confidence in the student to control their work leading to success. Finally, student counsellors can help students cope with stress by supporting them to make better study choices as well as to make changes that help decrease them stress levels (, (Bondarchuk et al., 2023).

Stress is a physical or emotional reaction to stressors that emanate either from external or internal the student (American Psychological Association, 2020). Such reactions influence almost every systemic aspect of the human body, affecting individuals' emotions and attitudes (American Psychological Association, 2020). On the other hand, stressors could take the form of human beings, locations or situations which may actually precipitate stress in somebody, but with specific emphasis on negative academic stress. However, a certain amount of stress or tension is recognised as assisting an individual to function on a higher level in certain situations, even though in the event that the tension accumulates they may be powerless to deal with the extreme emotions of stress that arise (Gustems-Carnicer et al., 2019).

Academic stress occurs when educational associated stipulations transcend the accommodative materials accessible to the person involved (Scott et al., 2019). The availability, existence and seriousness of the academic stressors, including the inability to handle or deal with extreme academic achievements and ultimatums, could affect the level of the stress reaction or feedback encountered (Levin, 2021).

Scientists have reported various causes of stress within higher education institutions which entail personal, environmental and adaptive or coping components (Alkhalwaldeh et al., 2023). Personal characteristics are important here; for example, students with greater amounts of neuroticism, a human trait distinguished by anxiousness and pessimism, have been shown to experience greater amounts of stress (Rettew et al. (2021). Moreover, students who are introspective and tend to isolate themselves from the communal situations may be more vulnerable to stress than students who are extroverts and enjoy communicating and social interaction (Gao et al., 2020). Students who have access to college or university resources like proper educational support networks or services could be more equipped to cope with stress thus increasing academic accomplishments (Amanvermez et al., 2020).

Al Battashi et al. (2021) reported that some of the factors that significantly precipitate and are connected with greater stress levels are the usage of smart phones and sleeping habits. The amount of stress within university and college student populations has been considered and properly recorded, showing consistency with regard to the aetiology and impact of the levels of stress and tension being encountered (Levin, 2021). In spite of this, all over the authorities, acquiring better grade scores, heavy workloads,

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