

Sources of Perceived Stress and Coping Strategies among Ghanaian University Lecturers

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Abstract:

Introduction: The study sought to investigate sources of perceived stress among lecturers of a Ghanaian university and coping strategies they use to mitigate and cope with perceived stress.

Methods: The cross-sectional survey design, which involved using the descriptive approach of research, was used for the study. Sampling techniques that were employed to select the sample for the study were proportionally stratified sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling. A questionnaire was used to obtain data from 159 participants. Means and standard deviation were used to analyse the research questions.

Results: The study revealed that the most stressful source of lecturers' stress was teaching large class sizes. The most preferred coping strategy used by lecturers to mitigate stress was found to be maladaptive.

Discussion: Lecturers' job goes beyond the lecture halls. Their workload encompasses teaching, research, and community service. Each of these job requirements are very involving, most especially, the teaching aspect. It is, therefore, not surprising that teaching of large class-size emerged as one of the most impactful sources of perceived stress among lecturers. This seemed to be as a result of increased intake of students in recent years with minimal expansion of

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university infrastructure and inadequate instructional facilities which also happened to be among of the most perceived stressors. In consequence, lecturers perceived their academic work as stressful, hence they made all efforts to mitigate work-related stress by the use of various coping strategies.

Limitations: The sample consisted of a single university in Ghana and the generalisability of results is limited. The results and findings of this study might have considerably varied with an increased sample size.

Conclusions: It was recommended that more lecturers should be employed in the university to commensurate with the increasing lecturer-student ratio to ease stress among lecturers. It is also recommended that lecturers patronise the institution's counselling centre for professional assistance to mitigate work-related stress experiences.

Key words: perceived stress, coping strategies, university lecturers.

Introduction

Education ultimately aims to offer individuals an opportunity to acquire knowledge, skills, attitudes and values to prepare them for life. Such training is purported to help make life meaningful for the self, others and society. A person who goes through the education process is groomed to be a rational human being, with a functional and complete mind to offer their quota to the service of humanity. As individuals go through the education system, the organised body of instructions and training they receive are later translated to the world of work to help build all sectors of the economy. In light of this, individuals strive to better their lots by enrolling on various programmes of study in higher institutions of learning to acquire the needed knowledge, skills, attitudes and values. Not only the youth, but also adults are in the race for higher education. This heightened desire for tertiary education has therefore brought about expansion in programmes offered by universities to meet the demand which inevitably puts pressure on the human resource of higher institutions of learning, especially, the teaching staff, generally referred to as Lecturers. Lecturers' work activities encompass teaching, research, community service, and equally performing administrative duties. They have the responsibility for the student's holistic development. Lecturers play multiple roles in the lives of their students. For instance, the lecturer is a teacher, an administrator, a role model, friend, counsellor, and father/mother in the lives of students. Furthermore, lecturers have a lot to do by way of reading and research, note preparation, preparation of teaching and learning resources, setting and marking of assignments/tests, supervising project works/dissertations/theses. In the wake of carrying out these duties, lecturers may come face-to-face with work-related stress issues owing to

workloads that have the potential of disorienting their psychological and physical well-being.

Undoubtedly, the increasing number of students that lecturers have to deal with in this era is becoming overwhelming. When the demands placed on lecturers at these higher institutions of learning exceed their capacity to cope, they may become susceptible to stress. Stress, according to Lazarus (2000), is an incongruence fit between the person and the environment, one in which the individual's resources are taxed or exceeded, forcing the person to usually struggle in complex ways to cope. It is, therefore, against this background, that this study sought to investigate what lecturers perceived as sources of stress in their line of work, and the coping strategies they used to mitigate work-related stress experiences.

1 Theoretical framework of the study

1.1 Perceived stress

Inasmuch as individuals would have preferred a stress-free life, it appears such a wish may not be a reality because stress is a fact of everyday life. Stress is a subject that is hard to avoid. It is worth noting that not all stress is negative or bad. In his early work on the concept stress, Selye (as cited in Kendall, Murphy, O'Neill, & Burnsnall, 2000) conceptualised two categories of stress which are eustress (good or desirable stress) and distress (bad or undesirable stress). Kendal et al. (2000) explains eustress to be pleasant in the sense that it has a challenging effect, and can produce positive effects, such as the maximisation of output and creativity. In contrast, distress becomes an undesirable stress as it is evident that an individual perceives the self as not having the ability to control a stressful event, or situation, which may result in decrees productivity and negatively impact overall levels of well-being. Even though everyone manifests a response to stress, reactions vary widely across individuals. This study, however, has used the term stress as generic to refer to the negative feeling or experiences of stress. Stress is what happens to one's mind or body as a result of a person's evaluation of an event or situation in the mind or psyche and the behaviour in response to the circumstances labelled as stressful. In effect, negative stress has the potential to affect an individual's physical and emotional well-being.

Lazarus (1990) explains perceived stress as a condition subjectively experienced by an individual who identifies an imbalance between demands addressed to him or her and the resources available to encounter these demands. Lazarus (2000) furthermore views the term stress as being complex and has multidimensional negative emotion. Robbins and Judge (as cited in Bowen, Rose, & Pilkington, 2016) refer to stress as an unpleasant psychological process that may happen as a

response to environmental pressures. Furthermore, Selye looks at stress to be the outcomes of demands on the body during experiences of fight or flight. It is the body's attempt to maintain homeostasis/physical equilibrium (Selye as cited in Bowen et al., 2016).

Research has consistently reported time pressure, high self-expectations, as well as research and publication demand as significant sources of work-related stress among academics (Barnes, Agago, & Combs, Smith; Anderson & Lovrich, Blix, Cruise, Mitchell & Blix; as cited in Salami, 2009). The fact is that prolonged or acute stress, as asserted by the Health and Safety Executive [HSE], (2012), can have negative impact on an individual's mental and physical health. HSE (2012) is of the view that stress could lead to other behaviours such as more tobacco smoking, excessive alcohol or caffeine consumption and skipping meals, which can also lead to health problems. Gelabert (2007) similarly opines that persons who experience prolonged and or intense stress are at the risk of suffering from serious illnesses such as, cardiovascular, hormonal, neurological autonomic, and immunological diseases just to mention a few.

As a consequence, work-related stress has ill-health implications which have the capability of undermining the achievement of goals, both for individuals and organisations. From the institutional point of view, stress may be associated with lecture halls overcrowding and inadequate resources thereby impacting the achievement of effective academic work (Awino & Agolli, 2008). Stress seems to have become an integral part of occupational demands on lecturers. With increased enrolment and multiple access programmes offered to students all year round, it is obvious that the demands of the lecturing job have increased. These multiple access programmes include intake of students for regular, sandwich, distance, evening, and weekend programmes. Such intensive work engagements have the capability to heighten the level of stress among Ghanaian university lecturers. There is a general understanding that excessive workload may have a negative impact on lecturers which can impact negatively on their emotional and physical health, and may relatively impact the quality of teaching and their commitment to work.

The study was premised on Person-Environment (P-E) Fit Theory and the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping.

1.2 Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) theory

Mayer and Dale (2010) view Person-Environment Fit (P-E Fit) theory as the degree to which individual characteristics harmonise with those of his or her environment. "The core premise of P-E fit theory is that stress arises not from the person or environment separately but rather by their fit or congruence with one another" (Edwards, Caplan, & Harrison, 1998, p. 2). The Person-Environment (P-E) fit theory postulates that high strain occurs when there is a mismatch or

incongruence between the person's needs and what they receive or are confronted with at work (Dawis & Lofquist, 1984). To this end, there needs to be a match between what people want and what they receive, as well as a match between their abilities and the demands placed upon them. Lack of match (misfit) may create strain and reduce a person's sense of psychosocial well-being. However, demands-ability and needs-supply match are considerably more relevant to people when the stimuli are important to them. Leka, Griffiths and Cox (2003) assert that work is recognised worldwide as a major challenge to workers' health and healthiness of their organisations. It is more likely that workers who are stressed may more likely be unhealthy, poorly motivated and less productive at work. Laws and Fiedler (2012), and Winefield and Boyd (2008) opine that the high job and environmental conditions among academic staff in the university translate into work-related stress. According to Imeokparia and Ediagbonya (2013), stress is the condition that results when person and environment transactions lead an individual to perceive a discrepancy, either real or imagined between the demand of a situation and the resource of the person's biological and social system.

1.3 Transactional model of stress and coping

The Transactional Model of Stress and Coping is a framework which emphasises appraisal to evaluate threat, harm, and challenges, which result in the process of coping with stressful events and situations (Lazarus, 1966; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). The transactional model of stress and coping assumes that stress occurs as a result of series of transactions between the person, environment, and situations or events (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984), the level of stress experienced in the form of thoughts, feelings, emotions and behaviours, as a result of external stressors, depends on a person's judgment of whether internal or external demands exceed resources and the ability to cope when demands exceed resources, and whether these are threatening to one's well-being. By implication, an individual must assess a situation or an event as harmful, threatening, or challenging; and whether they have the capacity and resources to cope. Although life event and issues could sometimes be overwhelming, one can put in specific measures to reduce the pressure so as to be in control of the situations and events at hand. Stress management involves altering stressful or overwhelming situations if possible, changing one's responses when it is impossible to change the situation, taking care of oneself, and making time for rest and relaxation. The utmost, step, therefore, is recognising the true source or sources of stress in one's life or work life, and making effort to manage them. When one knows the stressors, one is in a better position to poise him or herself towards reducing, preventing and or coping with stress for physical, mental and psychological health.

To this end, Sauter, Murphy, Colligan, Swanson, Hurrell, Scharf, Sinclair, Grubb, Goldenhar, Alterman, Johnston, Hamilton, and Tisdale (1999) postulate that two different approaches are best used to deal with stress. The first is to provide stress management training and Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) to help improve workers' ability to cope with difficult work situations. They posit that stress management training helps workers to understand the nature and sources of stress, and how stress affects a person's health. The second approach is organisational change. It involves identifying the stressful aspects of the work, (for example, excessive workload and conflicting expectations), and designing strategies to reduce or eliminate the stressors. Comparing the two approaches, Sauter et al. (1999) believe organisational change approach is the most direct way to reduce stress at work as it involves dealing directly with the root causes of stress at work. However, managers are uncomfortable with this approach as it may involve changes in work routines, work schedules, or complete change in organisational structure (Sauter et al., 1999). Hence, the appropriate actions should be a combination of organisational change and offering stress management training to employees to prevent or reduce work-related stress. Ultimately, university lecturers must learn healthier (adaptive) ways to manage stress. Their contribution to their mental, psychological and physical health is to be receptive to different strategies and techniques that focus on making them calm and in control. Additionally, good human resource management practices must also be put in place by employers to mitigate employee work-related stress.

2 Literature review

2.1 Perceived sources of stress

Work-related stress among teachers at the various level of the education ladder is a real phenomenon. Research evidences in a number of related studies carried out outside Ghana and a few in Ghana have shown that there is high stress and burnout among lecturers in higher educational institutions. Numerous variables have been reported in various research reports as contributing to stress and burnout among academic staff of higher institutions of learning. Byrne and Hall (1989), for example, found out role conflict, work overload, classroom climate and decision-making as organisational factors that contributed to lecturer stress and eventual burnout. Gillespie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, and Stough (2001) carried out a longitudinal investigation of occupational stress within Australian universities to examine experiences of work-related stress, and perceptions of sources of work-related stress, consequences and moderators of stress. Five major stressors were identified to include, inadequate funding and resources, work overload, poor management practice, job insecurity, and inadequate recognition and reward. Similar findings by Winefield and Jarrett (2001) among

an Australian Metropolitan University lecturers also had reports of increased pressure arising from funding cuts to universities, which resulted in heavier teaching loads and greater difficulty in securing research funds, as well as a decline in facilities and support for both teaching and research, and high student-staff ratios. Others reported issues, such as job insecurity, poor management and a lack of recognition and reward were some of the key factors driving the high level of stress among academic staff.

Zvada and Thomas (2019) found out that academic staff in Zimbabwean universities were experiencing high levels of occupational stress. The study revealed heavy workload, poor motivation strategies, lack of funding, long working hours and poor working conditions were the main drivers of stress among faculty members. The study also found that other stressors among academics also included poor remuneration, high student-lecturer ratio as sources of stress in academia. Furthermore, a study by Masuku and Muchemwa (2015) that was carried out to explore stress levels, symptoms, and common stressors among lecturers at Solusi University in Zimbabwe also revealed that most of the lecturers were stressed and others exhausted; and the most common stressors were reported to be increased workloads, need to hit targets/deadlines, and long working hours respectively.

Omoniyi (2013) carried out a study to determine sources of workplace stressors among university lecturers in south west Nigeria. The study found out sources of stressors, such as academic experience, poor conferences/research incentives, state of lecturers' office accommodation, lack of facilities for research, students' project and thesis supervision, to have induced stress in lecturers in various degrees. Achibong, Bassey and Effiom (2010) also sought to identify sources of stress among university academic staff of Cross River University of Technology, Nigeria and their findings among other things brought to the fore that interpersonal relationship with students, sourcing funds for research, collation of students' results, and sourcing funds for career development were found to be sources of stress. Atindanbila (2011) examined perceived stressors that lecturers at the University of Ghana encounter in their line of work. Stressors, such as school environment, teaching load, and professional distress respectively were reported as main perceived stressors, while administrative role was reported as the least perceived stressor. Bennet and Bamini (2013) investigated occupation stress among university academics of Ghana and found out that lecturers were highly stressed.

It may be deduced from the above series of studies that there exists numerous work-related stress-inducing variable of diverse forms among academic staff of institutions of higher learning. These reported perceived sources of stress have time and again been referenced as responsible for high rate of work-related stress experiences among university academic staff. The big question then is, how were

lecturers coping with these perceived sources of work-related stress? This then is a major gap this study sought to fill. Although a study by Kusi, Mensah, and Gyaki (2014) on work-related stress among academic staff of the Winneba Campus of the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana, that study's objective did not include finding out how stress experiences were mitigated. It was therefore believed that the issue of stress among lecturers might not be peculiar to only a single campus of the entire institution, but the remaining campuses as well, since they were all involved in similar job routines. This, therefore, made it imperative to carry out this study which sought to investigate sources of perceived work-related stress among lecturers and coping strategies that they employed to reduce or curb the negative effects of work-related stress, to include all four campuses of the University for broader and in-depth understanding of the situation at hand so that per the findings, recommendations and suggestions would be advanced for consideration by the university authorities and lecturers toward management of perceived stress.

2.2 Work-related stress and coping strategies

Coping strategies are the attempts by a person to control the pressure or manage the amount of stress being experienced. Lazarus and Folkman (1984, p. 141) defined coping strategies as “constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of a person.” When a person is saddled with the pressure of work, the logical thing to do is to find ways of dealing with such work pressure so as to bring the situation under a reasonable control. Hence, various research works on the subject of work-related stress among academics and the coping strategies that are employed point to the fact that as people assess their work demands and realise that they feel pressured and stressed up, they make efforts to find ways to mitigate the stress experiences. Few of such works have been cited as follows. Mohamed and Mohamed (2016) conducted a study in four females' colleges at Hafr al-Batin University in Saudi Arabia to investigate the factors causing occupational stress and coping strategies among the academicians. The most predominant coping strategies of physical stress were found to be walking, setting priorities, eating a balanced diet and taking time for rest, as well as praying, thinking positively, going for shopping and talking to someone to manage psychological stress. Yikealo and Tareke (2018) equally investigated stress coping strategies among College of Education students in Eritrea Institute of Technology, Maïnefhi. The results showed that students used more positive stress coping strategies than negative ones. Haseeb and Sattar (2018) also carried a qualitative study to explore causes of workplace stress among university teachers in Pakistan and the strategies they used to handle the stress. The study indicated workload, long duration of work hours, lack of

professional development, role conflict, unsupportive university administration, lack of resources, and inappropriate behaviour from students as the major causes of job stress among university teachers. Out of these stressors, the teachers reported that the major source of workplace stress was workload. These, notwithstanding, respondents explained they used various means to manage the workplace stress experiences. It came to light that even though they did not get any formal training on how to cope with work stress, they tried to mitigate stress by attending seminars, listening to motivational speeches, and spending additional hours in the office after close of work to complete their work. A study by Zvada and Thomas (2019) to find out causes and implications of stress, stress management and coping mechanisms among academic staff of the Catholic University in Zimbabwe revealed, among other things, that academics experienced stress related disorders. Most of the stress related disorders experienced were sleeping problems, feeling overwhelmed, fatigue and various pains, including headaches. The findings further indicated poor interpersonal relationships, work overload, poor conditions of service, large class size, and lack of professional development as the major stress emitting sources among academic staff. The structured interview interaction sought to inquire from interviewees the best ways of coping with stress and the responses given included, exercising, attending church, time management, recreation, which most felt included drinking alcohol with friends, and spending time with positive people and family.

3 Methodology

3.1 Research questions

The study was guided by the following research questions:

1. What are the sources of perceived stress among lecturers?
2. What are the coping strategies used by lecturers to mitigate stress?

3.2 Research design

This study adopted a descriptive survey design. According to Creswell (2014) the descriptive survey design provides a numeric description of trends, attitudes, beliefs or opinions of a population by studying a sample of that population and from the sample results the researcher generalises or draws reasonable inferences to the population. Osuala (2001) opines that the design is highly regarded by policy makers in educational research as data gathered by way of descriptive survey represents field conditions. The researchers, therefore, believe that the design is appropriate because this study sought to investigate perceived sources of stress and coping strategies among a Ghanaian university lecturers.

3.3 Population of the study

The population of this study consisted of lecturers in the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana. The institution comprises four major campuses with a total population of 515 lecturers. This number comprises 409 males and 106 females. Their academic status are Assistant Lecturers, Lecturers, Senior Lecturers, Associate Professors, and Professors, and they fall between the ages of 30 and 70 years.

3.4 Sample and sampling procedure

The sample size for the study was 259. The University of Education, Winneba which was used for the study was made up of four campuses namely, Winneba campus, Ajumako campus, Kumasi campus, and Asante-Mampong campus. The researchers employed proportionally stratified sampling, simple random sampling, and purposive sampling strategies to draw the sample for the study. First, the proportionally stratified sampling method was used to draw the male participants from the various campuses as the institution already exists in strata. Thus, out of 264 males on the Winneba campus, 93 were sampled, Kumasi campus had 82 males and 35 were sampled. Asante-Mampong campus had 37 males out of which 17 participants were sampled, and Ajumako campus had 23 males out of which 8 participants were sampled for the study. In all, a sample size of 153 males was earmarked for this study. The researchers used all the females to form part of the samples for the various campuses because as compared to the males, the females were relatively fewer. The breakdown of the female population of the various campuses was as follows: Winneba had 78 females, Kumasi had 16 females, Asante-Mampong had 4 females, and Ajumako had 8 females. In all, the 106 females were used for the study. Finally, we applied the simple random sampling method, specifically, sampling without replacement for the selection to get the males to add to the females. The study sample therefore consisted of 153 males and 106 females.

3.5 Research instrument

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire. It was designed based on issues relating to perceived stressors and coping strategies. The instrument had two subscales apart from the demographic information of participants. One subscale had 22 items on what participants perceived as sources of stress in their line of work. It was structured along a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from “Extremely Stressful”, “Very Stressful”, “Stressful”, “Not Stressful”, and “Not at all Stressful” with the numeric values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The other subscale had 17 items that covered coping strategies participants used to mitigate perceived work stress. It was structured along a five-point Likert-type scale that ranged from “Strongly Agree”, “Agree”, “Neutral”, “Disagree”, and

“Strongly Disagree” with the numeric values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 respectively. The face and content validity of the instrument were carried out by experts in the field of guidance and counselling and measurement and evaluation in the Departments of Guidance and Counselling, and Educational Psychology at the University of Cape Coast in Ghana. The instrument was pre-tested on 31 lecturers (21 males and 10 females) at the College of Education Studies of the University of Cape Coast, Ghana. These lecturers possessed similar characteristics with lecturers from the University of Education, Winneba, Ghana who were used for this study. The Cronbach’s alpha coefficients of internal consistency for the questionnaire was 0.95 for the perceived sources of stress scale and 0.65 for the coping strategy scale. This implied that the instrument was reliable and could be used for research purposes.

3.6 Data collection procedure

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Institutional Review Board of the University of Cape Coast prior to the data collection period. The researchers sought permission from the research sites to carry out the research. Consent of participants who were selected for the study was sought before administering the questionnaire. The purpose of the study was explained to them and they were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Questionnaires were given to individual participants at the four research sites and respective dates were set for the collection. The researchers visited the sites at due dates to collect the questionnaires.

3.7 Data analysis

Descriptive statistical tools were used to analyse and interpret the data. Specifically, mean score and standard deviations were used to analyse the data relating to the two research questions.

4 Results

The results are presented as follows:

Research question 1: What are the sources of perceived stress among university lecturers?

This question sought to find out what lecturers perceived as sources of stress in their academic work. Table 1 shows various sources of stress among lecturers.

Table 1

Descriptive statistics of sources of perceived stress among lecturers

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
Teaching large class-size	4.03	0.92
Marking/scoring/grading of students' papers	3.91	0.88
Students' projects/theses supervision	3.87	0.95
Overall academic workload	3.87	0.85
Inadequate annual leave	3.76	1.05
Inadequate instructional facilities	3.75	1.93
Time constraints	3.72	0.79
Preparation of examination results	3.65	0.93
Teaching practice supervision	3.61	1.01
Criteria for promotion	3.60	1.09
Actual teaching load	3.51	0.97
Family and work-life balance	3.47	1.01
State of lecturers' office	3.41	1.14
Setting of examination questions	3.23	0.90
Delays in payment of remuneration/salaries	3.20	1.33
Lecture notes preparation	3.15	0.97
Invigilation of examinations	3.13	1.02
Administrative responsibilities	3.09	1.10
Students' disciplinary issues	3.06	0.96
Unclear work appraisal system	3.04	1.00
Participation in university fund generation activities	2.94	1.05
Job security	2.87	1.18

Source: Survey data, 2019 Note: 1.00-1.99 = Less stressful source of stress; 2.00-2.99 = Moderately stressful source of stress; 3.00-3.99 = Very stressful source of stress; 4.00-4.99 = Extremely stressful source of stress

The results from Table 1 revealed that teaching large classes was identified as an extremely stressful source of stress among lecturers ($M=4.03$, $SD=0.92$), followed by marking/scoring/grading of students' papers ($M=3.91$, $SD=0.88$). Next to it is students' projects/theses supervision ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.95$), closely followed by overall academic workload ($M=3.85$, $SD=0.85$), while the moderately stressful source of stress was job security ($M=2.87$, $SD=1.18$). Stress could emanate from the teaching of large class sizes of students with its attended activities such as marking, scoring, and grading of students' papers; supervision of students' projects/theses and overall academic workload among others as shown in this study, there is the need for lecturers to adapt effective coping strategies to mitigate stress.

Research question 2: What are the coping strategies used by university lecturers to mitigate stress?

This research question sought to find out coping strategies lecturers used to mitigate and cope with perceived stress. The results are shown in Table 2.

Table 2

Descriptive statistics of lecturers' coping strategies

<i>Statements</i>	<i>Mean</i>	<i>SD</i>
I use alcohol/stress reducing drugs to relax.	4.35	1.00
I participate in religious activities.	4.05	0.86
I think more of the positives/benefits of what my work has to offer me.	3.87	0.80
I manage my time effectively to reduce stress	3.56	0.92
I try to get adequate sleep	3.54	1.05
I discuss how I feel about the pressure of work with colleagues.	3.53	1.12
I engage in a hobby or other personal activities	3.45	1.07
I watch movies/TV to take my mind off work pressure.	3.38	1.14
I try to get emotional support from friends or relatives.	3.28	1.00
I take direct actions to get around the stressful situation.	3.25	0.85
I accept the fact that my line of work is stressful and nothing can be done about it.	3.10	1.18
I eat lots of my favourite food.	3.03	1.04
I make time to exercise regularly.	2.96	1.07
I practice relaxation techniques.	2.92	1.15
I force myself to contain the pressure in the teaching work.	2.85	1.25
I refuse to accept that my work puts a lot of pressure on me.	2.76	1.24
I consult a counsellor for professional help.	2.31	1.06

Source: Survey data, 2019 Note: 1.00-1.99 = Less frequently used coping strategy; 2.00-2.99 = Moderately frequently used coping strategy; 3.00-3.99 = Very frequently used coping strategy; 4.00-4.99 = Most frequently used coping strategy

Results from Table 2 reveal that the use of alcohol/stress reducing drugs to relax was the most frequently used coping strategy participants used to manage stress ($M=4.35$, $SD=1.00$). This is followed by participation in religious activities ($M=4.05$, $SD=0.86$), thinking more of the positives/benefits of what the work has to offer ($M=3.87$, $SD=0.80$), and effective time management ($M=3.56$, $SD=0.92$) respectively. The results in Table 2 also show that consulting a counsellor for professional help to manage stress is the least coping strategy that lecturers resorted to. Stress is said to be human-specific and as such individuals adopt various strategies to manage stressful experiences. Coping strategies are described by stress management experts as adaptive (positive) and therefore healthy; or maladaptive (negative), unhealthy ways to manage stress (Kirby, Shakespeare-Finch, & Palk (2011). Hence, the report in Table 2 of the use of alcohol or drugs as the most frequently used coping strategy ($M=4.35$, $SD=1.00$) by lecturers to mitigate stress is undoubtedly unhealthy, and therefore, has implications for counselling. Moreso, the results indicated a rather low response ($M=2.31$, $SD=1.06$) for the item that stated, "I consult a counsellor for professional help". This implies that not many lecturers consider consulting a counsellor for professional help in managing work-related stress worthwhile and this is shown by the results in Table 2.

5 Discussion

The main purpose of the study was to investigate sources of perceived stress among lecturers and the coping strategies they used to mitigate stress. The first research question sought to find out the sources of perceived stress that lecturers encounter in their line of work. Many perceived stressors were enumerated. The study found out that the most stressful source of perceived stress among lecturers was “Teaching large class-size”. This was followed by “marking/scoring/grading of students” papers, “supervision of students” projects work/theses”, and “overall academic workload” respectively. Lecturers reported “job security” to be the least source of perceived stress.

For “teaching of large class-size” to emerge as the most impactful source of perceived stress among other perceived stressors listed in the scale could be due to the increased intake of students (lecturer-student ratio) in recent years with minimal expansion of university infrastructure as well as inadequate instructional facilities, which also happened to be among one of the most perceived stressors. This finding aligns with Kusi, Mensah and Gyaki (2014) that “large class size” was also a major contributing factor to the stress experienced by lecturers. The findings additionally had lecturers reporting “marking/scoring/ grading of students’ papers”, students’ project works/theses supervision”, and “overall academic workload” to be the second, third and fourth very stressful perceived sources of stress respectively. These revelations bring out the fact that in addition to the actual teaching load, which translates into increased contact hours of teaching, lecturers had a lot to do in order to get assessment results of students ready. This result is consistent with the findings of Kusi et al. (2014) that excessive workload was identified as the most frequent source of perceived stress among lecturers of the University of Education, Winneba campus. It was attributed to the highly disproportionate lecturer-student ratio as well as too many programmes that were introduced without employing adequate lecturers to teach on the programmes. This study shares the same observations that more lecturers should be employed to meet the growing institutional demands, and lessen lecture stress. Findings by Atindanbila (2011) equally showed that sources of stress among lecturers included teaching load. It is also consistent with the findings of Jarvis (2002) and Masuku and Muchemwa (2015) that workload is the leading perceived stressor among lecturers.

Even though inadequate instructional facility was found to be one of the perceived sources of stress in this study, it did not support the findings of Omoniyi (2013) who found lack of instructional facilities as being the topmost source of perceived stress among lecturers in the University. The situation of increased student numbers, with its attended consequences, such as teaching large class sizes, marking/scoring/grading students’ papers, supervising students’ project works and theses, and supervising students on teaching practice, among

others, contributed largely to perceived stress level among lecturers of all the satellite campuses of the institution. It is, therefore, an undeniable fact that when lecturers are overwhelmed by large student numbers with its related activities that have become the norm in recent times, there is a high possibility that the quality of academic work could be adversely affected; thereby bringing the quality of the human capital product the university turns out yearly to the job market into disrepute. The emanating stress experiences from such stressors mentioned above could also negatively impact lecturers' physical and psychological health. It is, however, satisfying to note that though many factors were reported as stressors, "job security" was reported to be the least source of perceived stress among lecturers. This implies that lecturers' reports of high stress levels were of no threat to their job-security. This could be attributed to the fact that lecturers were doing their best to manage work-related stress, which may also imply that job change might not be an option to be desired even as lecturers experience work-related stress at various levels.

Research question two sought to find out about the coping strategies lecturers used to mitigate work-related stress. Generally, adaptive coping strategies help to reduce stress. Undoubtedly, some strategies may increase stress, and in turn, may be considered maladaptive. Since coping strategies could be appraised as adaptive (healthy) and maladaptive (unhealthy), it was worthwhile, for counselling implications, to investigate the coping strategies lecturers used to mitigate stress in their line of duty. Participants used many coping strategies to manage work-related stress. It is, therefore, obvious that an individual's coping style is a vital resource for psychological adjustment to stressful situations. Participants had various stress coping strategies with responses that indicated how frequently they made use of those coping strategies. Some of the coping strategies could be categorised as adaptive while others were maladaptive. It came out from the result that an appreciable number of lecturers resorted to adaptive coping strategies to manage stress. For example, most lecturers reported that they participated in religious activities to manage stress. This is an adaptive coping strategy to resort to. As Africans, and for that matter, Ghanaians, we believe that our involvement in religious activities relieves us from stressful experiences. This finding is supported by the finding of Adom, Essel, and Chukwuere (2020) that most students resort to what they termed, 'Africultural' coping mechanisms (prayers, attending church programmes, and reading religious books) to mitigate academic-related stress. Findings also showed that lecturers tried to manage time effectively to reduce stress, and they also tried to get adequate sleep. Some also resort to watching movies/TV to take their mind off work pressure, as well as engage in hobbies or other personal activities to ease work-related stress. These findings are equally in consonance with that of Kwaah and Essilfie (2017) who equally found various ways individuals try to

manage stress the best possible way they could. For instance, they found that students used multiple strategies, such as “praying/meditating, self-distracting activities” (watching TV/movies and listening to music) as a means of coping with stress. Others resort to browsing the internet, WhatsApp chats, and sleeping/resting to manage stress. All these are adaptive coping strategies that people adapt to effectively reduce stress experiences they go through.

The finding of this study is congruent with Amponsah et al. (2020) who found that learners utilise more adaptive coping strategies than maladaptive and avoidance coping strategies. It is also supported by Haseeb and Sattar (2018) whose findings showed coping mechanisms that university teachers used to manage work-related stress were adaptive (positive/healthy). The finding also aligns with the findings of Yikealo and Tareke (2018) who indicated that students used more positive stress coping strategies than negative ones to manage stress. Furthermore, social support is another great coping mechanism that individuals could adopt to help deal with work-related stress. To this end, it was fulfilling to find out that most lecturers reported that they discussed how they felt about the pressure of work with colleagues. They also tried to get emotional support from friends or relatives. Although these measures are described as adaptive stress coping strategies, this revelation rightly interpreted why lecturers did not patronise guidance and counselling services as revealed in the Table. There seems to be the notion that counselling is for students only. Lecturers, therefore, perceived the university counselling centre to be solely for students and not lecturers. They rather cope with work-related stress experiences, and even other personal emotional issues by speaking to trusted colleagues, friends or relatives rather than consulting a counsellor. Hence, from the results shown in the Table, the statement, “I consult a counsellor for professional help” had the lowest score. This finding is coherent with that of Kodua-Ntim, Akussah, and Adjei (2021) whose study revealed that library staff in some public universities did not patronise counselling centres for assistance in dealing with personal problems because they perceived that the counselling centres were only for students. They though tried to manage stress, but not through the assistance of professionally trained counsellors. This further goes to affirm the general perception of both academic and non-academic staff of universities in connection with their patronage of guidance and counselling services to help solve personal problems, including stress management strategies. Counsellors should encourage academic and non-academic staff to equally seek professional assistance to deal with work-related stress and any other personal issues of concern.

Utilising adaptive stress coping strategies may enhance the functional, psychological and physical well-being of individuals. It is, therefore, worrying to note that some people resort to maladaptive strategies to mitigate work-related stress. Among the items, many lecturers reported “I use alcohol/stress reducing

drugs to relax” as the most coping strategy; also, “I eat lots of my favourite food.”; “I accept the fact that my line of work is stressful and nothing can be done about it.” These have health implications. “I refuse to accept that my work puts a lot of pressure on me.” This last statement is equally a maladaptive coping strategy as it portrays denial. The denial that one is experiencing stress even though there are indications of stressful feelings, could be disastrous for one’s health. Such a person needs professional help to come to terms with the situation at hand and to find specific solutions for healthy management. This revelation is rather a maladaptive way to try to manage stress because of the health implications this may pose to lecturers.

Furthermore, the report “I use alcohol/stress reducing drugs to relax” as a coping strategy for stress should be of great concern because using alcohol or drugs for relaxation is short-lived, and therefore, categorised as maladaptive coping strategies. These are detrimental to a person’s psychological and physical well-being. More so, maladaptive strategies are short-term measures because they hinder one’s ability to face the reality of the stressful situation to develop more adaptive coping measures. This finding is congruent with the results of a related study by Ravindran, Shankar, and Murthy (2019) which indicated that cancer patients adapted maladaptive coping strategies more often than the adaptive ones. It is possible, therefore, that persons who use adaptive coping strategies perceive a greater sense of control in stressful situations than those who resort to maladaptive strategies.

Though this study shows that adaptive coping strategies were resorted to by most lecturers to manage and cope with work-related stress, some coping strategies that some lecturers resorted to were maladaptive. To this end, there is the need for counsellors in the university to offer stress management seminars to support lecturers to effectively manage work-related stress. As stated earlier in the literature review on the subject of coping strategies, Folkman and Lazarus (as cited in Kausar, 2010) assert that coping strategies primarily assume to have two functions which involve managing the problem causing stress and governing emotions relating to those stressors. In line with these assumptions, Kausar (2010) posits that most studies confirm two major related findings. The first is that a situation is evaluated as stressful whenever the individual perceives an inadequate ability to cope with it, while the second is that stressors perceived as controllable elicit more proactive coping mechanisms while those perceived as uncontrollable elicit more avoidance strategies. In sum, as lecturers perceived their academic workload as stressful, and they seem to be making all efforts to mitigate the work-related stress by the use of various coping strategies, they should equally not shy away from seeking professional assistance for appropriate coping strategies for good physical and psychological well-being.

Conclusions

The study sought to investigate sources of stress among university lecturers and the coping strategies they employed to mitigate work-related stress. The results indicated teaching large class-sizes, inadequate instructional resources and overall academic workload contributed to the faculty stress level. Hence, employing more lectures to compensate for high student-lecture ratio, and provision of adequate instructional resources would ease faculty members' work-related stress. Apart from the findings that lecturers made use of many coping strategies that could be described as adaptive or healthy to manage work-related stress, it was also revealed that the most frequently used coping strategy was rather maladaptive, and therefore short-lived and unhealthy. Since lecturers tried to manage work-related stress the best way they could, they should as well seek professional counsellors' expertise to assist them with healthy coping strategies to mitigate work-related stress.

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Acta Educationis Generalis
Volume 15, 2025, Issue 1

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