ACADEMIC STRESS AND RECREATIONAL INVOLVEMENT AMONG UNDERGRADUATES IN OBAFEMI AWOLOWO UNIVERSITY, ILE-IFE, NIGERIA: A STUDY OF PREVALENCE AND INVOLVEMENT

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Abstract

This study assessed academic stress and recreational involvement among undergraduates at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria, examining the prevalence of academic stress and level of involvement in recreational activities among the undergraduate students. The study used a descriptive survey design with 1000 respondents selected through multi-stage sampling (cluster sampling, random sampling and convenience sampling techniques) procedure. A structured questionnaire with three sections (PIQ, PASS, and PAQ-A) was used to collect data on sociodemographics, academic stress, and physical activity. Data were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study found a high prevalence of academic stress driven by concerns over failure, job prospects, and workload, with significant percentages experiencing stress related to fear of failure (73.48%), job prospects (72.5%), examination times (83.7%), workload (98.1%), parental expectations (66.5%), and competition for grades (70.3%). Despite this, students exhibit confidence in decision-making (92.2%) and some report having time to relax (84.8%). The study also highlights

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that students are generally less involved in recreational activities requiring facilities or organized groups (e.g., hockey, volleyball, basketball), with the majority of students report never participating in most recreational activities, while activities that require less equipment or can be done individually (dance, walking, jogging/running, aerobics) see higher engagement. Conclusively, there is a high academic stress among undergraduates due to concerns like failure and workload. Despite this, students showed confidence. Recreational activity participation was relatively low. To address this, it is recommended that universities should provide stress management workshops and promote recreational activities to foster a healthier campus environment.

Keywords: *Academic Stress, Recreational Involvement, Undergraduates, Stress Management, Stress Coping Mechanisms.*

Introduction

Stress, as described by Elizabeth (2020), refers to any kind of dynamic change that leads to physical, emotional, or psychological pressure. It can be defined as a state of mental or emotional strain caused by adverse or demanding circumstances. The issue of stress has gained significant prominence both within academic circles and in contemporary public life. Numerous researchers in the domain of behavioural science, like Ogakwu, Ede, Agu, Manafa, Ezeaku, Onah, and Oneli, (2023) and Al Houri, Jomaa, Arrouk, Nassif, Al Ata Allah, Al Houri, and Latifeh, (2023), have conducted thorough investigations on stress and its consequences, and have reached the conclusion that the subject requires more focus.

Academic pressure is a very significant source of stress in the lives of students. Academic stress, specifically, occurs when academic demands exceed a student's ability to manage and adapt, leading to mental distress regarding expected academic challenges or fear of failure. According to Wilks (2008), academic stress involves "mental distress regarding expected academic challenges or failure, or even fear of the possibility of academic failure". In simpler terms, academic stress is the pressure students put on themselves to perform well academically, which can be exacerbated by external factors like parental or societal expectations.

Academic stress encompasses several factors, referred to as stressors, that induce tension and hinder academic progress at educational institutions. These stressors might be interpersonal, intrapersonal, societal, health-related, or environmental in nature. Stress, when experienced to a moderate extent, is believed to ignite the flame of drive and diligence in learners. Nevertheless, an overwhelming amount of academic pressure that exceeds the cope mechanisms of students hampers their academic and career advancement and may have negative effects on their well-being. Failure to effectively control unrestrained academic stress may lead to physiological, mental, emotional, and physical repercussions (Adom, Chukwuere, & Osei, 2020).

Student academic stress is a widespread phenomenon among university students worldwide, and its prevalence has been steadily rising. Research conducted by Adubale and Nwadiani (2018) indicates that business education students in Nigerian tertiary institutions encounter a significant degree of stress. However, a worthwhile use of leisure time can remediate the academic stress. Leisure is often described as the quality of an experience or as the use of spare time. Leisure refers to free time or discretionary time, where individuals can engage in activities they enjoy, relax, and recharge. According to Veal (2019), leisure is "time that is free from obligations, such as work, education, or family responsibilities."

Furthermore, a worthwhile recreation can be an antidote to academic stress. Recreation refers to activities that individuals engage in during their leisure time, which provide enjoyment, relaxation, and rejuvenation. Recreation can include a wide range of activities, such as sports, hobbies, travel, or creative pursuits. According to Henderson and Gibson (2013), recreation is "an activity or experience that is chosen for its own sake, provides enjoyment, and is engaged in during leisure time." These activities serve as means for establishing connections, diverting attention, expanding knowledge, and facilitating spontaneous social interaction, as well as allowing the open expression of creative abilities.

Dongyub (2022) suggested that supporting undergraduate students in managing daily stressors with lasting consequences can be achieved by exploring various recreational activities, which can be a valuable approach to improving their quality of life, psychological well-being, and overall happiness. This study aimed to the explore the prevalence of academic stress and recreational involvement among the undergraduate students of Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife, Nigeria.

Research Objectives
The objective of this study is:
  i.   To assess the prevalence of academic stress among undergraduate students in Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife.
  ii.   To assess the level of involvement in recreational activities among undergraduate students in the study area.

Methodology
Sample and Sampling Procedure
A total of 1000 respondents were sampled from undergraduate students from five faculties (Pharmacy, Education, Arts, Agriculture, and Administration) at Obafemi Awolowo University, Ile-Ife for this study. A multi-stage sampling (cluster sampling, random sampling and convenience sampling techniques) procedure was used involving, clustering the students populace into 13 faculties (clusters). Five faculties/clusters (Pharmacy, Education, Arts, Agriculture, and Administration) were selected using simple random sampling. Subsequently, convenience sampling was employed in selecting 200

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respondents from each faculty/cluster. The sampling process aimed to ensure representation from diverse faculties within the university.

Data Collection

The study employed a descriptive research design, using a structured standardized questionnaire was used as an instrument for data collection. The research instrument entails three sections —"Personal Information Questionnaire (PIQ)" to collect socio-demographic details, "Perceived Academic Stress Scale (PASS)" to measure academic stress, and "Physical Activity Questionnaire for Adolescents (PAQ-A)" to gauge students' participation in extracurricular activities, and physical activities. The instrument scoring system is made up of a 5-likert scale which are rated as Strongly agree, Agree, Undecided, Disagree, and Strongly disagree.

Data Analysis

Data collected in the study were analysed using descriptive statistics. Descriptive statistics such as mean, standard deviation, frequency, and percentage counts were used to describe the respondents and aggregate the data. All analysis was done using the IBM Statistical Package for Social Sciences (IBM-SPSS ver. 25).

Result

Table 1: Summary of the Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Variables	Responses	F	%	Mean ± S. D
Age:	15-20 years	345	34.5%	
	21-25 years	602	60.2%	20.9 ± 2.8
	26-30 years	53	5.3%	
Sex:	Male	503	50.3	
	Female	497	49.7	
Class	100 Level	117	11.7	
	200 Level	341	34.1	
	300 Level	357	35.7	
	400 Level	161	16.1	
	500 Level	23	2.3	
	600 Level	1	1.0	

Table 1 presents the demographic characteristics of the respondents. The study's participants had an average age of 21.86 years (SD=2.37), with most between 19-25 years old. The gender distribution was fairly balanced, with 50.3% female and 49.7% male. The majority of participants were 300 level (35.7%) and 200 level (34.1%) students.. These characteristics provide a comprehensive snapshot of the study population.

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Table 2: Prevalence of Academic Stress

Statement	Strongly agree	Agree	Undecided	Disagree	Strongly disagree	Total
1. I am concerned about failing classes this year.	351 (35.1%)	350 (35.0%)	186 (18.6%)	113 (11.3%)	0 (0.0%)	1000 (100%)
2. Incapable of keeping pace if falling behind in the job.	221 (14.7%)	504 (33.6%)	360 (24.0%)	241 (16.1%)	174 (11.6%)	1000 (100%)
3. The examination duration is limited for correcting the answers.	664 (66.4%)	119 (11.9%)	119 (11.9%)	97 (9.7%)	1 (0.1%)	1000 (100%)
4. I think that the workload exceeds reasonable levels.	296 (19.7%)	495 (33.0%)	211 (14.1%)	334 (22.3%)	164 (10.9%)	1000 (100%)
5. The unattainable expectations set by my parents cause me significant worry.	372 (37.2%)	151 (15.1%)	301 (30.1%)	115 (11.5%)	61 (6.1%)	1000 (100%)
6. The competition among my classmates for grades is really fierce.	346 (34.6%)	335 (33.5%)	105 (10.5%)	214 (21.4%)	0 (0.0%)	1000 (100%)
7. Typically, the test questions are challenging.	484 (48.4%)	344 (34.4%)	103 (10.3%)	69 (6.9%)	0 (0.0%)	1000 (100%)
8. I have full assurance that I will excel academically.	766 (76.6%)	156 (15.6%)	77 (7.7%)	1 (0.1%)	0 (0.0%)	1000 (100%)
9. I have plenty leisure time available after school.	593 (59.3%)	228 (22.8%)	157 (15.7%)	22 (2.2%)	0 (0.0%)	1000 (100%)

Table 2 presents the summary of the prevalence of academic stress among the respondents. The data analysis reveals a high overall level of academic stress among respondents, with an average response reaching 82.95% of the maximum possible stress score on an academic stress scale that also reflects aspects of academic confidence and available leisure time. Specifically, a significant percentages of the respondents experiencing stress related to fear of failure (73.48%), job prospects (72.5%), examination times (83.7%), workload (98.1%), parental expectations (66.5%), and competition for grades (70.3%). This indicates that academic stress is a substantial concern for many undergraduate students. However, it was noted that, 92.2% of students feel confident in making academic decisions, reflecting very high self-assurance among the respondents. Meanwhile, 84.8% feel they have enough time to relax after work.

Table 3: Level of Involvement in Recreational Activities

Activity	NO	1-2 times	3-4 times	5-6 times	7 times or more
Skipping	695 (69.5%)	163 (16.3%)	63 (6.3%)	37 (3.7%)	42 (4.2%)
Walking for exercise	300 (30.0%)	262 (26.2%)	137 (13.7%)	231 (23.1%)	70 (7.0%)
Bicycling	487 (48.7%)	83 (8.3%)	150 (15.0%)	253 (25.3%)	27 (2.7%)
Joggling or running	393 (39.3%)	129 (12.9%)	237 (23.7%)	238 (23.8%)	3 (0.3%)
Aerobics	457 (45.7%)	147 (14.7%)	207 (20.7%)	186 (18.6%)	3 (0.3%)
Swimming	611 (61.1%)	302 (30.2%)	55 (5.5%)	32 (3.2%)	0 (0.0%)
Dance	287 (28.7%)	338 (33.8%)	320 (32.0%)	49 (4.9%)	6 (0.6%)
Football	447 (44.7%)	159 (15.9%)	289 (28.9%)	59 (5.9%)	46 (4.6%)
Hockey	744 (74.4%)	185 (18.5%)	44 (4.4%)	0 (0.0%)	27 (2.7%)
Volleyball	743 (74.3%)	143 (14.3%)	65 (6.5%)	3 (0.3%)	46 (4.6%)
Basketball	808 (80.8%)	123 (12.3%)	38 (3.8%)	4 (0.4%)	27 (2.7%)

Table 3 presents the descriptive analysis of the level of involvement in recreational activities among undergraduate students. Students are generally less involved in recreational activities requiring facilities or organized groups (e.g., hockey, volleyball, basketball), with the majority of students report never participating in most recreational activities, particularly in skipping (69.5%), hockey (74.4%), volleyball (74.3%), basketball (80.8%), swimming (61.1%), and bicycling (48.7%). Activities that require less equipment or can be done individually (dance, walking, jogging/running, aerobics) see higher engagement, with a notable exception observed in Dance and walking for exercise, reflecting higher regular participation likely due to their accessibility. Very few students are highly active ("7 times or more") in any activity, highlighting a significant gap in sustained recreational engagement among respondents. This pattern may reflect barriers related to access, time, or interest, indicating areas where health promotion strategies could focus.

Discussion

The findings of a high prevalence of academic stress among undergraduate students due to concerns like failure, job prospects, and workload in this study is consistent with the studies carried out by Yikealo, Tareke and Karvinen (2018), Mofatteh (2021) and Barbayannis, Bandari, Zheng, Baquerizo, Pecor and Ming (2022) where they affirmed that academic stress is a multifaceted issue that can be stemming not only from rigorous academic demands but also from competitive peer dynamics, high parental expectations, and stringent examination standards, and can negatively impact mental health and academic performance. This finding is also consistent with findings by Pascoe, Hetrick, and Parker (2020), who noted that academic pressure remains the leading source of chronic stress among university students worldwide, resulting in pervasive effects on mental health, sleep quality, and academic performance.

Furthermore, the data indicate that this elevated level of stress persists despite many students expressing confidence in their academic abilities and perceiving some

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leisure time availability—a nuance aligning with findings by Misra and McKean (2000), who emphasized that even students with strong academic self-efficacy are not immune to stress if the academic environment is competitive and expectations are high. The interplay of stressors found here echoes previous research by Sohail (2013), which identified workload, parental expectations, fear of failure, and peer competition as dominant contributors to academic stress across both developed and developing country contexts.

Furthermore, the findings that majority of students never participate in organized or facility-dependent sports such as basketball, hockey, volleyball, skipping, swimming, and even bicycling, but a higher level of involvement in the activities that require less equipment or can be done individually such as dance, walking, jogging/running, aerobics is also in line with Taylor, Spray and Pearson (2014) who reported variations in students' engagement in physical activities, with some reporting regular involvement while others exhibiting sedentary behaviour during specific contexts such as Physical Education classes, lunchtime, and evenings. Keating, Guan, Piñero, & Bridges, (2005) and Irwin (2007) suggested substantial barriers to access, including facility costs, lack of organized teams, and limited time as reasons students disengage from structured physical activity. Particularly, dance and walking that stand out as highly accessible and regularly practiced, corroborates the findings from Zakrajsek, Martin, and Wrisberg (2017), who identified flexibility, social appeal, and the ease of integrating these activities into daily routines as key drivers for student participation.

Conclusion
The study found a high prevalence of academic stress among undergraduate students due to concerns like failure, job prospects, and workload. Despite this, students showed confidence in decision-making and some had time to relax. While students engage in diverse recreational activities, overall participation is relatively low.

Recommendations
Based on the conclusion of this, the following recommendations are made to mitigate academic stress and promote student well-being:
  i.   Universities should offer stress management workshops and mentorship programs
 ii.   Provide diverse recreational activities and accessible facilities
iii.   Universities should establish comprehensive support services and create a supportive campus environment
 iv.   Universities should regularly monitor student well-being and gather feedback for improvement.

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