

## **Class Level Differences in Stress Experiences and Coping Strategies among Undergraduate Students**



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**ABSTRACT:** This study assessed the class level differences in stress experiences and coping strategies among undergraduate students in Ghana. The study employed a descriptive survey design. Simple random sampling technique was used to select 265 undergraduate students out of the 846 student population in the Department of Education and Psychology. The research instrument used for data collection was a questionnaire entitled “Stress Experiences and Coping Strategies” (SECS). Means and standard deviations were used to analyse the research questions. The findings revealed that common stress experiences varied, with lack of social contact with students of other faculties in the University as the most common stress experienced among the respondents. Also the most commonly used coping strategy was having enough rest. Based on the findings, it was recommended that the University should champion and promote inter-faculty, social and academic programmes and activities that would enable students to interact, socialize and build rapport among themselves.

**KEYWORDS:** stress experiences, coping strategies, undergraduates, class level differences, counselling, university education

### **INTRODUCTION**

Stress is frequent and often an unavoidable aspect of daily life (Owusu, 2014). The term stress means different things to different people. There is a difference between eustress, which is a term for positive stress, and distress, which refers to negative stress (Garrett, 2001). Auerbach and Gramling (2008) assert that stress is explained as events or situations that cause individuals to feel tension, pressure, or negative emotions such as anxiety and anger. Abundance of literature shows that university students are exposed on a regular basis to multiple stressors (Bojuwoye, 2002; Kim, Newton, Downey & Benton, 2010; Mudhovozi, 2011). Nelson and Low (2011) agree with Letseka, Breier and Visser (2009) on the assertion that undergraduates have been under pressure to perform academically, adapt to the higher education setting and manage finances, among other things. Academic stressors that cause stress in undergraduate students involve the pressure of studies (Bataneh, 2013; Ekpenyong, Daniel, & Aribo, 2013).

Conley and Lehman (2012) further explain the components of academic pressure as test pressure and failing a test. Phinney and Haas (2003) explain pressure of studies as academic work load. Similarly, Okoro (2018) classified stressors into two broad categories, academic stressors and non-academic stressors. Elias, Ping, and Abdullah (2011), similarly, placed the focus on academic stress based on past researches: academic workload, attending lectures, grades, school curriculum and inadequate learning resources, subject-related assignments and unfriendly academic environment factors. The academic performance could also be affected by the non-academic stressors such as, adjustments to college life, housing arrangements and changes in lifestyle, academic requirements, support systems, and ineffective coping skills (Wamala, 2019). In view of these, it is evident that academic stress could be caused by both academic and non-academic variables. These stressors lead to stress in the life of students.

According to Krumrei-Mancuso, Newton, Kim, and Wilcox (2013), life stress affects academic performance, as well as predicts first year students' GPA. Research studies (Elias et al. 2011; Votta & Benau, 2013) have revealed that there is a negative relationship between life stress and GPA (academic achievement) of undergraduate students. Elias et al. (2011) also reported that first year undergraduate students had low levels of stress compared with the students in the other class levels. This form of adaptation to life stress as a student could lead to chronic diseases and eventual death. Dziegielewski, Turnage, Roest-Marti (2004) acknowledged that students who enrolled in caring professions exhibit stressors related to emotional exhaustion (burnout). The

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perception of students in the caring professions is that stress can negatively affect achievement of educational goals (Dziegielewski et al., 2004). Several students experience stress when they seek to balance busy lives, school and job with one another; although they still strive to spend time with their family and friends.

Regardless of the various stresses of the 21st century, undergraduate students have trouble dealing with them, and this call for training services in schools that help them understand how to deal with these stressors (Frydenberg et al. 2004). Stress rates among college students are higher than those of other individuals (Jia & Loo, 2018). Students are often stressed by a number of influences that lead them to feel tension in one form or another (Frydenberg et al., 2004). Inability to manage duties, issues or challenges in a quiet and confident way could also result in stress among undergraduate students. One way of dealing with stress among students is to plan carefully.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) are of the view that coping is the process of managing the internal and external demands that one appraises as tasking or overwhelming. Although different researchers use slightly different terminologies to define the major methods people use to cope with adversity, failure and stressful situations, coping strategy does appear to be a common thing in research. Coping strategies have been divided along several domains. The major domains are Problem-focused, Emotion-focused, and Avoidance-focused strategies.

A third-year student could cope with the life stress because he or she has been exposed to various stressors since his/her first year. To further support this assertion, Salam et al. (2015) discovered that life stress had no significant impact on third year students. Madhyastha, Latha, and Kamath (2014) conducted a cross-sectional survey with 117 final year students on stress and coping strategies among medical students in Karnataka. The study revealed that majority of the participants experienced mild and moderate amount of stress. Further analysis indicated that the predominant coping strategy employed by the students were planning, active coping, acceptance, and self-distraction.

Amponsah, Adasi, Mohammed, Ampadu, and Okrah (2020) investigated 270 third year undergraduate students' stressors and coping strategies at the University of Ghana. The findings from the research indicated that the three major stressors of the third-year students included working to meet scholastic requirements, changes in eating and sleeping habits and inadequate supply of electricity and water in halls. Also, the participants used strategies such as praying and self-diverting actions to cope with the stress they experienced. Chawla and Sachdeva (2018) also investigated into domains of stress and coping strategies employed by first year medical students. The study indicated that the common stress causing factors for first year students include academic stressors and group related stressors. The predominant coping strategies employed by the first-year students were planning, positive reframing, and active coping. It is enlightening to note here that first and second year students are vulnerable to the effects of stressful situations on campus. It is against this background that this study sought to explore the class level differences in stress experiences and coping strategies among undergraduate students of University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

### **STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM**

The exposure to life stress among undergraduates in the University varies from person to person from the perspective of perception of threat, desirability, personal resources, ability to cope, and response options. Elias et al. (2011) and Al-Qahtani, and Alsubaie (2020) opined that the pressure to perform well in examination or test and time allocated makes academic environment very stressful, when these events take place, an individual becomes disorganized, disoriented and therefore less able to cope, thus resulting in stress-related health problems. Too much stress can interfere with how a student prepares, concentrates, performs and stays in college. Being a first-year student can cause adjustment to college to be even more difficult. Some students have to work in order to pay their school fees and meet other financial needs in college. This can pose a number of hazards for such students, especially if they have to work late at night, leaving them with little or no time to study. This can then negatively reflect in their academic work and on their grades. Worrying about their financial issues and their grades can be an immense stressor to students' academic life.

Subsequently, as a result of stress, there is frequent visit by students to the University hospital to seek medical treatment for their ailments. A chat the researchers personally had with one of the doctors revealed that most of the ailments of students are stress-related. Students experience psychological, physiological and emotional disorders which are caused by social, health and academic factors on campus. This study was therefore informed by the stress experiences students go through on University of Cape Coast campus which adversely affects their lives including their academic performance. Limited studies have been conducted to identify the class level differences in stress among undergraduates in Ghana. The study therefore sought to fill this gap by exploring the class level differences in stress experiences and coping strategies among undergraduate students of University of Cape Coast, Ghana.

### **PURPOSE OF THE STUDY**

Generally, the purpose of this study was to identify some of the stress experiences of the university students and to find out some of the coping strategies they adopt to overcome the stress on the basis of their class levels. Specifically, the study sought to examine the extent to which University of Cape Coast students' class levels (100, 200, 300, and 400) affect their stress experiences and

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coping strategies.

## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the most prevalent stress experiences of undergraduate students on the basis of class level in UCC?
2. What are the most common coping strategies employed by undergraduate students of UCC in dealing with stress in relation to their class levels?

## METHODOLOGY

Descriptive survey design was used in this study. The population was all the undergraduates of the Department of Education and Psychology, University of Cape Coast consisting of 846 students. As compared with other departments in the Faculty of Educational Foundations, students in the Department of Education and Psychology do more credit hours. They also engage in practicum sessions which are very demanding and stressful. Simple random sampling was used to select a sample of 265 which represents 31.3% of the population. This was in consonance with the submission of Krejcie and Morgan's (1970) mathematical method for estimating sample size. A Questionnaire titled "Stress Experiences and Coping Strategies" (SECS) which have features of different forms of stress and coping strategies was used to gather the relevant data for the study.

The questionnaire was a 4-point, Likert-type scale with Strongly Agree scored as 4, Agree as 3, Disagree as 2 and Strongly Disagree as 1, giving the scale a range of 1 to 4. Hence, the cut-off point for determining whether any stress experience of students is worth noting was calculated. This was found to be 2.5 thus: Range between the highest score possible and lowest score possible was 3 (i.e.  $4-1=3$ ). The mid-point of this range is therefore 1.5 (i.e.  $3/2=1.5$ ). Therefore, the cut-off point is  $4-1.5$  or  $1+1.5$  which is 2.5. Hence, any stress item score that was 2.5 or higher was classified as "high stress" while any score lower than 2.5 was classified as "low stress" (Tables 2). The same process was used to arrive at the cut-off point of 2.5 for coping strategy. Here, a coping strategy score of 2.5 or higher was classified as "commonly used," while any coping strategy score lower than 2.5 was classified as "less used" (Tables 3).

## VALIDITY AND RELIABILITY

Validity and reliability of the instrument were ensured. In this study the researchers put in measures to ensure validity particularly, face validity, internal validity and content validity. To deal with internal validity the researchers made sure that the instrument contained the 'right' items which elicited the expected information. This was achieved through peer examination by three lecturers: one in Education and Psychology, one in Guidance and Counselling and the other in Measurement and Evaluation.

Pre-testing of the questionnaire was carried out in order to ascertain its validity and reliability as suggested by Bowden, Fox-Rushby, Nyandieka, and Wanjau (2002). It afforded the researchers the opportunity for correcting the language problems in the questionnaire for an accurate understanding of its items. 30 participants from the Department of Agriculture were selected for the pre-test exercise. These participants were similar in grade and characteristics to those who participated in the real study. Cronbach's Alpha coefficient was used to estimate the internal consistency of the questionnaire. The results showed a high degree of reliability of the instrument as the Cronbach's Alpha co-efficient was .80.

## DATA COLLECTION AND DATA ANALYSIS

The researchers sought approval from the Head of the Department of Education and Psychology of the University of Cape Coast to involve the students of the Department in the study. A note was also attached to each questionnaire indicating the purpose of the study. Also, participants were assured of anonymity and confidentiality. Copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers with the assistance of two research assistants in the Department. The data collected were analysed descriptively using frequency, percentage, means and standard deviations. The analysis was done through the use of SPSS computer software (version 21). The results of the analysis are presented in Tables 1-3 respectively.

**Table 1: Distribution of Participants by Academic Levels**

Level	Frequency	Percent
Level 100	55	20.8
Level 200	61	23.0
Level 300	56	21.1
Level 400	93	35.1
Total	265	100

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Table 1 shows that level 400 has the majority of the undergraduate student population at the University of Cape Coast. The reason may be that more of them were admitted into the university in the year of their admission than in the other years.

### Research Question 1: What are the most prevalent stress experiences of undergraduate students on the basis of class level in UCC?

In order to answer this question, means and standard deviations were used. The results are presented in Tables 2.

**Table 2: Most Common Stress experiences among Level 100, 200, 300 and 400 Students of UCC**

Stress Experiences	Level 100		Level 200		Level 300		Level 400	
	M	Rank	M	Rank	M	Rank	M	Rank
Meeting obligation within inadequate time frame	3.96	1 <sup>st</sup>	2.54	17 <sup>th</sup>	2.64	14 <sup>th</sup>	2.74	15 <sup>th</sup>
Engaging in relationship with the opposite sex.	3.89	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.07	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.94	12 <sup>th</sup>	3.04	12 <sup>th</sup>
Having to do too many things simultaneously.	3.63	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.51	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.48	15 <sup>th</sup>	2.75	14 <sup>th</sup>
Disagreement with a lecturer.	3.54	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.10	11 <sup>th</sup>	3.21	6 <sup>th</sup>	3.14	9 <sup>th</sup>
Feeling cheated.	3.52	5 <sup>th</sup>	3.52	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2.95	11 <sup>th</sup>	3.33	6 <sup>th</sup>
Facing difficulty in achieving the required academic target.	3.39	6 <sup>th</sup>	2.69	15 <sup>th</sup>	3.20	7 <sup>th</sup>	3.44	5 <sup>th</sup>
Fear of being unable to catch up if left behind.	3.37	7 <sup>th</sup>	3.43	6 <sup>th</sup>	3.34	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.49	17 <sup>th</sup>
Making crucial decisions about one's future career.	3.32	8 <sup>th</sup>	2.59	16 <sup>th</sup>	2.46	16 <sup>th</sup>	2.99	13 <sup>th</sup>
Non-supportive environment for extracurricular activities.	3.31	9 <sup>th</sup>	3.25	10 <sup>th</sup>	3.14	8 <sup>th</sup>	2.72	16 <sup>th</sup>
Having financial difficulties.	3.22	10 <sup>th</sup>	3.34	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.62	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.31	7 <sup>th</sup>
Having your contributions in class not considered.	3.15	11 <sup>th</sup>	3.38	7 <sup>th</sup>	3.48	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.24	8 <sup>th</sup>
Poor health condition.	3.02	12 <sup>th</sup>	3.49	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.96	10 <sup>th</sup>	3.11	11 <sup>th</sup>
Lack of social contact with students of other faculties	3.01	13 <sup>th</sup>	3.66	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.50	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.54	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Unable to remember facts in examination hall.	3.00	14 <sup>th</sup>	3.50	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.02	9 <sup>th</sup>	3.65	1 <sup>st</sup>
Misunderstanding with family members.	2.94	15 <sup>th</sup>	2.87	13 <sup>th</sup>	3.91	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.53	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Dissatisfaction with certain academic policies of the university	2.80	16 <sup>th</sup>	3.26	9 <sup>th</sup>	2.88	13 <sup>th</sup>	3.52	4 <sup>th</sup>
Poor ability in a subject area	2.25	17 <sup>th</sup>	2.80	14 <sup>th</sup>	2.27	17 <sup>th</sup>	3.13	10 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.24</b>		<b>3.17</b>		<b>3.06</b>		<b>3.15</b>	

From Table 2, it is clear that with exception of the item 'poor ability in a subject area such as mathematics' which had a mean score of 2.25 representing 'low stress' according to the cut-off point, the remaining 16 items are all major life stress events that level 100 students of the University of Cape Coast go through because all the mean values scored (2.80-3.96) that represent high stress in terms of the cut-off point. In respect of ranking, clearly, the most common stress experience among the level 100 students as indicated in Table 2 is 'Meeting obligation within inadequate time frame' which is the first item on Table 2 with a mean score of 3.96. This was followed by 'Engaging in relationship with the opposite sex' with a mean value of 3.89 and standard deviation of 0.50.

Also, Table 2 shows that all the 17 items responded to by the level 200 students scored mean values which are above 2.5 indicating 'high stress' among these undergraduates. The implication is that all these stress experiences are present in the everyday life of these students which if not controlled could have adverse effect on them in diverse ways leading to low academic achievement. In terms of ranking of these stressful experiences among the level 200 students, 'lack of social contact with student of other faculties' ranked first with average score of 3.66. This was followed by 'feeling cheated' and 'having to do too many things simultaneously' with mean scores of 3.52 and 3.51 respectively.

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From Table 2, all stress experiences items apart from ‘Poor ability in a subject area’, ‘Having to do too many things simultaneously’ and ‘Making crucial decisions about one’s future career recorded mean values above 2.5 which represented ‘high stress’. This implies that these stressful life experiences are prevalent with the level 300 students. Similar trend was identified with the level 100 students. In ranking items based on the mean values, majority of the students indicated misunderstanding with family members as the most common stress experience among the level 300 students with a mean score of 3.91. This was followed by ‘having financial difficulties’ with a mean score of 3.62.

Additionally, responses by the level 400 on the specific kinds of stress experiences they are confronted with as undergraduate students are also presented in Table 2. From Table 2, only ‘fear of being unable to catch up if left behind’ with a mean score of 2.49 was recorded as ‘low stress’ by the students. This implies the item is not any serious stressful life experience that confronts the level 400 students. However, all the other items scored mean scores indicating that the students agree to the fact that they are confronted with these stressful experiences. In terms of ranking to show their level of prevalence and as clearly indicated in Table 2, the item ‘unable to remember facts in examination hall ranked first with a mean value of 3.65. This was followed by ‘lack of social contact with student of other faculties’ and ‘misunderstanding with family members with mean scores of 3.54 and 3.53 respectively.

### Research Question 2: What are the most common coping strategies employed by undergraduate students of UCC in dealing with stress in relation to their class levels?

In response to this research question, means and standard deviations were used to analyse the data on coping strategies of undergraduate students. The results are presented in Table 3.

**Table 3: Common Stress Coping Strategies used by Level 100, 200, 300 and 400 Students of UCC**

Coping Strategies	Level 100		Level 200		Level 300		Level 400	
	M	Rank	M	Rank	M	Rank	M	Rank
Relaxation	3.78	1 <sup>st</sup>	2.95	8 <sup>th</sup>	2.36	14 <sup>th</sup>	3.44	1 <sup>st</sup>
Engaging yourself in a creative activity	3.72	2 <sup>nd</sup>	3.02	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.50	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.97	11 <sup>th</sup>
Developing one healthy habit each month	3.56	3 <sup>rd</sup>	2.64	13 <sup>th</sup>	2.91	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.13	8 <sup>th</sup>
Aerobic exercise	3.52	4 <sup>th</sup>	2.39	15 <sup>th</sup>	3.36	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2.87	13 <sup>th</sup>
Preparing adequately towards examinations	3.48	5 <sup>th</sup>	2.98	6 <sup>th</sup>	2.68	11 <sup>th</sup>	2.81	14 <sup>th</sup>
Having enough sleep	3.43	6 <sup>th</sup>	2.72	11 <sup>th</sup>	3.16	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.40	2 <sup>nd</sup>
Avoiding lateness	3.37	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.54	14 <sup>th</sup>	2.77	10 <sup>th</sup>	3.12	7 <sup>th</sup>
Having enough rest	3.15	8 <sup>th</sup>	3.64	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.14	4 <sup>th</sup>	3.11	9 <sup>th</sup>
Doing one thing at a time	3.11	9 <sup>th</sup>	3.23	4 <sup>th</sup>	2.79	9 <sup>th</sup>	3.29	4 <sup>th</sup>
Simplifying your schedule	3.04	10 <sup>th</sup>	2.97	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.39	13 <sup>th</sup>	2.61	15 <sup>th</sup>
Engaging in sporting activities	3.00	11 <sup>th</sup>	2.90	9 <sup>th</sup>	2.16	15 <sup>th</sup>	3.00	10 <sup>th</sup>
Learning from mistakes	2.87	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.66	12 <sup>th</sup>	2.95	6 <sup>th</sup>	3.25	3 <sup>rd</sup>
Having realistic opportunities to change a negative situation	2.83	13 <sup>th</sup>	3.31	3 <sup>rd</sup>	3.00	5 <sup>th</sup>	3.18	6 <sup>th</sup>
Wishful thinking	2.81	14 <sup>th</sup>	3.49	2 <sup>nd</sup>	2.94	7 <sup>th</sup>	2.88	12 <sup>th</sup>
Engaging in fun activities	2.80	15 <sup>th</sup>	2.82	10 <sup>th</sup>	3.48	1 <sup>st</sup>	3.24	5 <sup>th</sup>
<b>Overall Mean</b>	<b>3.23</b>		<b>2.95</b>		<b>2.84</b>		<b>3.09</b>	

From Table 3, it is obvious that all the coping strategy items scored means ranging from 2.80-3.78 representing ‘commonly used’. In terms of ranking, the most frequently mentioned item indicated by the participants as a way of coping with stress was ‘relaxation’ with the mean score of 3.78. This was followed by ‘engaging oneself in a creative activity’ and ‘developing one healthy habit each month’ with means scores of 3.72 and 3.56 respectively. This finding appears to mean that majority of level 100 students use relaxation to reduce their stress in order not to suffer the adverse effect of stress. On the other hand, the least ranked stress coping strategy was ‘engaging in fun activities’ with a mean score of 2.80.

Again, Table 3 also presents the summary of responses of the level 200 students with regards to stress coping strategies. From Table 3, all the coping strategy items with the exception of ‘aerobic exercise’ scored means indicating that the participants agreed to the fact that there are strategies they resort to in dealing with their stressful situations. However, the participants disagreed to the use of ‘aerobic exercise’ as a major stress coping strategy because the mean scored by the item was below the cut-off point of 2.5 indicating less used. With regards to ranking of the items which were commonly used by the participants, it was clear that ‘having enough rest’ with a mean score of 3.64 came first. This was followed by ‘wishful thinking’ and having realistic opportunities to change a negative situation with mean scores of 3.49 and 3.31 respectively. From Table 3, it is revealed that eleven of the coping strategy items were commonly used by the level 300 students investigated based on the means scores of these items. A few among

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the items were 'engaging in fun activities', 'aerobic exercise' and 'having enough sleep' with mean scores of 3.48, 3.36, and 3.16 respectively. On the other hand, the remaining four items in Table 3 were less used to by the participants. This basically implies that they are less considered as techniques adopted in dealing with stress experience.

In addition, concerning level 400s, Table 3 shows that all the fifteen coping strategy items scored means between 2.61 and 3.44 greater than the cut-off point of 2.5, hence all the items are major strategies commonly used by the level 400 undergraduate students to manage their stress. This appears to mean that among the level 400 students most of them used relaxation as number one strategy to reduce their stress. Even though generally all the items in Table 3 received affirmative responses, there were differences in terms of ranking based on their mean scores. For instance, as clearly presented in Table 3, 'relaxation' with mean score of 3.44 recorded the highest responses from the participants. This was followed by 'having enough sleep' with a mean score of 3.40. The lowest ranked stress coping strategy was 'simplifying one's schedule' with mean score of 2.61.

## DISCUSSION

Research question one was meant to determine the most prevalent stress experiences of undergraduate students on the basis of class level. The result of the study revealed further that the level 100 undergraduate students of UCC have a lot of stress experiences which affect their school life. They however, reported low levels of stress with regards to poor ability in a subject area with a mean value of 2.25 which represented 'low stress' based on the cut-off point. However, with regards to the level 200 students and life stress events they all agreed to the fact that all the 17 items used to elicit responses are stress experiences they go through and ranked 'lack of social contact with student of other faculties' as the most common stress experience that affect them on campus. Additionally, the level 300 students also admitted that they were confronted with a lot of stress experiences as they went through campus and the most prevalent one was "Misunderstanding with family members". A similar picture was witnessed among the level 400 students in respect of stress experiences. They gave their most common stress experience among the lot as 'unable to remember facts in examination hall'. However, generally all the students indicated 'Lack of social contact with student of other faculties' as the most common stress experience. Nonetheless, level 400 students experience higher levels of stress compared to level 300 students. Final year students may exhibit various forms of stress due to the academic demands on them in their final year. This results is in line with Hamurcu (2018) who revealed that fourth year students had higher expectations about their academic success and their life in the future and therefore, they experienced more severe educational stress. Similarly, Carmo et al. (2016) also concluded in their study that as students advanced in their years of study their level of stress accelerates.

Relatively, it is evident from the overall mean that level 100 students experience higher levels of stress compared to level 200 students. This is because majority of first year students take time to adapt to university life after their second cycle education. This poses much stress to undergraduate students in their first year. This finding refutes the findings reported by Elias et al. (2011) that first year university students experience low levels of stress. Schafer (1996) also reported a strong relationship between stress and college students and indicated that many undergraduate students, especially first year students undergo considerable stress due to the demands associated with change such as becoming independent decision makers and competing against new standards. Contrarily, Chemutai and Mulambula (2020) revealed that undergraduate students in year three experience higher levels of academic stress than those in the other years of study. The connections of these findings could be as result of the demanding academic workload that university education requires from learners at this high level of scholarship.

Research question two was meant to determine the common coping strategies mostly employed by undergraduate students of UCC in dealing with stress in relation to their class levels. The finding on coping strategy used by undergraduate students to deal with stress revealed, that undergraduate student of the University of Cape Coast have various ways of coping with stress. The findings revealed that level 100 students predominantly used relaxation to deal with stress, while those in level 200 resorted to having enough rest to cope with academic stress. Also, level 300 students mostly used relaxation and aerobic exercise to deal with the stress they experience. Level 400 students reported that they used relaxation as the common coping strategy to deal with stress. The current study found that "relaxation", "aerobic exercise" and "having enough rest" were the most prevalent way of coping with stress by the undergraduate students of University of Cape Coast.

The findings are in agreement Amponsah et al. (2020) who reported that level 200 and 300 students usually used engaging in fun activities like watching TV, movies, and listening to music to cope with stress. The findings corroborates the findings of Yikealo, Yemane and Karvinen (2018) who reported that majority of second, third and fourth year students in college practice healthy stress coping strategies like engaging in sports, reading, watching movies, listening to music, walking, chatting with friends, etc. The study supports the finding reported by Kim and McKenzie (2014) that engaging in regular physical exercises enables university students in higher levels to cope with academic stress. The similarities of these findings could be as a result of the fact that students view rest, relaxation and aerobic exercise as very valuable de-stressors. This knowledge of dealing with stress by the students might have been acquired from their personal experience and observation in dealing with stressful experiences on University campus.

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### CONCLUSION

It can be concluded that the particular year groups among undergraduate students that experience higher levels of stress are first year and final year students. It behooves on students in this category to take cognizance of their stress levels and work to reduce it to enhance their wellbeing and academic success. The predominant coping strategies adopted by all levels of undergraduate students in dealing with the stress that they experience include; engaging in fun activities, aerobic exercise, having enough sleep, relaxation, and engaging in creative activities. Indeed, these coping strategies are life-saving activities for students who have been identified as the most stressful among all the class levels of students. Therefore, engagement in these coping strategies is sure ways of remaining healthy in the face of their academic endeavours and progress.

### RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings the following recommendations were made by the researchers:-

1. The findings revealed that the students at the University of Cape Coast go through a lot of activities that are stressful. For instance, meeting obligation within inadequate time frame, which is a stressful experience that needs the attention of the university authorities. In the light of this situation, it is recommended that, there should proper schedule of academic activities for students, where students are given adequate time to adjust and complete one task of activities before another in order to aid them to deal with stress that emanate from the high academic engagement that this level of education brings.
2. It is recommended that the various counsellors assigned to students at the university in collaboration with the Counselling Centre should institute proactive measures such holding seminar and conference for students especially level 100 and level 400 students on stress and coping strategies in the hall of residence. Through this intervention, counsellors in the halls and Counselling Centre would be able to frequently identify and also encourage students to report some of the stressful life experiences that need guidance and counselling for them to be dealt with.
3. To add to this, students should be given regular and frequent orientation and guidance on how to personally and uniquely handle and cope with stressful situations as a result of high academic demands associated with university education (such as regular exercise, starting assignment on time, taking a tour on campus and outside campus for sight-seeing or socialization or to learn something new), so that they could adjust and deal appropriately with the challenges they encounter as a result of stress.

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