

## STRESS EXPERIENCES AND EMOTIONAL INTELLIGENCE DISPOSITION OF FEMALE UNDERGRADUATE IN UNIVERSITY OF BENIN, BENIN CITY

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### **Abstract**

*This study was carried out to examine the stress level and emotional intelligence of undergraduates. Three research questions were raised and analysed. The population of the study comprised of female undergraduates in the Halls of residence of the University of Benin with a total population of one thousand six hundred students (1600); while a sample size of 160 students making up 10% of the entire population of study was used. The sample size was achieved using simple random sample technique of balloting by replacement. A structured questionnaire was used for data collection and analyzed using simple percentage. While the test- re test reliability method was adopted to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The Pearson Correlation Coefficient is 0.824. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The result revealed that; the stress level of students and their emotional intelligence can relatively affect the students academic performance, this study also showed at that the higher the stress level of students the lower their emotional intelligence. Helping students develop their EI holds promise to help them more effectively manage stress which should result in higher academic performance and perhaps even graduation rates. Efforts should be intensified to establish curriculum plans so as to integrate effective practical strategy to help ensure the development of the emotional intelligence of students as well as put systematic activities in place for evaluating the students.*

### **Introduction**

In today's competitive world, every student will feel the effect of stress at some point of time in their life. Some students feel more stressed out in comparison to others, some students handle stress more efficiently than others, but no one can completely roll out stress out of life. Thus, stress is an unavoidable phenomenon in all aspects of human life. It is a process by which one perceive and cope with environmental threats and challenges (Myers, 2005). It can be explained in terms of sadness, worries, tension, frustration which leads to depression which is temporary or may last for long. The presence of stress depends on the presence of the stressor. Volpe (2000) defined stressor as anything that challenges an individual's adaptability or stimulates an individual's body or mentality. Stress is one of the most fundamental problems spanning through human endeavour. Nweze (2005) stated that for two and half decades, stress phenomenon has become a typical issue in management development, seminars and workshops in Nigeria. The popularity of stress stems from a number of obvious reasons. First, nobody is immuned to stress. We can be caught up in a situation that causes or induces stress in the individual. Thus as a human being whether the young, old, rich, poor, professionals and lay men alike are potential victims of stress

(Bhat, 2017). Strain means to make great demand on something; tension is a mental or emotional strain that makes natural relaxed behaviour impossible; and pressure is a powerful demand on somebody's time, attention or energy. Halgin and Whitbourne (2003) conceptualized stress as an unpleasant emotional reaction a person has when he or she perceives an event to be threatening. They stated that this emotional reaction may include heightened physiological arousal due to increased reactivity of the sympathetic nervous system. The stressor is the event itself, which is also called a stressful life event. Timothy Emmanuel lim (2020) said stress is a state of mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse or demanding circumstances. When a person is faced with disturbing situations, a change in his normal behaviour is usually noticeable. Such an individual may be faced with emotional, cognitive and physiological disruption or malfunctioning which can disorganise and adversely affect his powers of reasoning (Bryant and Brown, 2004).

Those who suffer from stress are most likely to indulge in destructive behavior or Experience Emotional symptoms like mood swings, depression and so on (Godati et al, 2015). Having noticed that stress is more significant in behavior of man, emotionally intelligent individuals are most likely to manage stress better. Emotional intelligence refers to the capability of a person to manage and control his or her emotions and possess the ability to control the emotions of others as well. In other words, they can influence the emotions of other people also thereby are capable of managing stress as they understand and are aware of the stressors. Every health problem that does not have a permanent cure can be managed like stress (Brougham et al, 2009). Students at the University level (undergraduates) are at the critical stage of their lives because at this stage they are faced with several challenges as they are gradually being exposed to life's realities and daily being faced with new tasks to accomplish, deadlines to beat academically, as well as processes of building capacity for the coming years (Cynkar, 2007). It is their stage of maturing and preparing for adulthood, therefore they go through high levels of stress due to these factors. But students have failed to recognize the need for emotional intelligence and this has caused increased outbreaks of traumatic stress experiences and other effects like depression, suicide, restlessness, anxiety, loss of appetites, confusion, lack of motivation, chest pain. Here emotional or psychological stress has given rise to physical and biological effects (Fallahzadeh, 2011).

Institutions and schools have likewise paid little attention to the students' academic stress levels and emotional intelligence thereby increasing the already existing problem. To this end there is need to examine the relationship between student's stress levels and emotional intelligence so as to improve the stress manageability skills of students as well as tackle the problem of negligence has created (Hunter and Thatcher, 2007).

### **Methodology**

This study utilised a descriptive research design to investigate the stress experiences and emotional intelligence disposition of students. The population for this study consisted of 1,600 students residing in the Queen Idia Hall of Residence at the University of Benin, located in Ovia North East Local Government Area of Edo State. Using a simple random

sampling technique, 10 percent of the residents were selected, resulting in a sample size of 160 students.

Data was collected through a questionnaire adapted from Jimoh, Adovi, Olugbenga, Akeem, and Oluseyi's (2018) study titled *Examining the Stress Levels of Students and Their Emotional Intelligence Questionnaire (ESLSEIQ)*. The questionnaire has two sections: Section A gathers demographic information, such as response rate, age, and educational level, while Section B contains 13 items designed to explore the correlation between stress levels and emotional intelligence. Respondents answered each item on a two-point rating scale. Since the original authors validated the instrument, additional validity checks were deemed unnecessary. To assess reliability, the test-retest method was used by administering 20 copies of the instrument to 20 students from the Department of Educational Management. After two weeks, the same instrument was administered again to the same students, and responses were correlated using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Coefficient, yielding a reliability score of 0.82. The questionnaires were administered directly to respondents by the researcher and assistants and collected on the same day to ensure a high response rate. This data collection process lasted five days.

## Results

**Research Question One:** What are the stress level of students?

**Table 1: Stress experiences of students**

S/N	ITEM	Agree	Disagree
1	I feel overwhelmed by the demands of daily life.	140 (85.5%)	20 (12.5%)
2	I find it difficult to relax, even during my free time.	120 (75%)	40 (25%)
3	I experience frequent headaches, muscle tension, or body aches.	100 (62.5%)	60 (37.5%)
4	I feel anxious or worried most of the time.	120 (75%)	40 (25%)
5	I have trouble sleeping due to racing thoughts or worries.	130 (81.2)	30 (18.7)
6	I feel irritable or frustrated more often than usual.	120 (75%)	40 (25%)
7	I have difficulty concentrating on tasks or making decisions.	112 (70%)	48 (30%)
8	I feel emotionally exhausted or drained at the end of the day.	122 (76.2%)	38 (23.7%)

The data in Table 1 provides valuable insights into the stress experiences and emotional awareness of students residing in Queen Idia Hall. It revealed that a significant majority of the students, about 87.5%, were quick to recognize when they lost their temper, highlighting a high level of emotional self-awareness. Only a small percentage, 12.5%, reported difficulty in identifying this change in their emotions. When it comes to self-motivation, most students around 75% indicated that they can push themselves to complete difficult tasks, even if they find them challenging. This suggested a general resilience and drive among the students. However, a minority, about 25%, struggle with motivating themselves for challenging tasks,

which may affect their ability to perform consistently. The data also showed that most students, 62.5%, recognised when they were feeling stressed, although a notable 37.5% lacked this self-awareness. This discrepancy suggested that while the majority were in tune with their stress levels, a significant portion were probably unaware of their stress, potentially impacting their mental health and daily functioning. A substantial number of students, 75%, reported that they did not allow stressful situations or individuals to affect them once they leave their work environment. This indicated that most students have effective boundaries in place, enabling them to separate work-related stress from other aspects of life. In contrast, 25% find it difficult to leave stress behind, possibly leading to prolonged stress that may affect other areas of their lives.

Interestingly, the majority of students, approximately 81.2%, feel capable of reframing bad situations quickly, demonstrating a high level of adaptive coping skills. This ability to shift perspective is valuable for maintaining emotional stability during difficult times. However, a smaller portion, 18.7%, struggled to reframe negative situations, which could lead to prolonged stress and challenges in emotional management.

Regarding self-motivation in low moments, 75% of the students were able to encourage themselves even when they feel down, while 25% find it challenging to stay motivated in such times. This self-motivation is essential for resilience, especially in a demanding academic environment. In terms of handling personal issues, 70% of the students feel confident in their problem-solving abilities, while 30% are less confident. This confidence gap suggests that while most students feel equipped to manage personal challenges, a significant minority may lack the necessary confidence, which could hinder their ability to cope with stress effectively.

Finally, the data reveals that 76.2% of students experience nervousness and tension when working under deadlines. This prevalent response to deadlines highlighted a common source of stress among students, which may interfere with their academic performance and well-being. Only 23.7% reported not feeling pressured by deadlines, suggesting they may have better stress management or time-management skills. These findings suggested that while most students possessed emotional awareness and can generally manage stress effectively, a considerable portion still struggled with certain stressors, particularly deadlines. This indicated a need for support systems or interventions to help these students enhance their stress management abilities, particularly in high-pressure academic situations.

**Research Question 1:** What are the emotional intelligence dispositions of the students?

Table 1: Emotional intelligence of students

S/N	ITEM	Agree	Disagree
1	I can let go of anger quickly	110 (68.7%)	50 (31.2%)
2	Difficult people do not annoy me	140 (87.5%)	20 (12.5%)
3	I can tell if someone has upset or annoyed me	87 (54.3%)	73 (45.6%)
4	When I am being 'emotional' I am aware of this	90 (56.2%)	70 (43%)
5	I am excellent at empathising with someone else's problem	110 (68.7%)	50 (31.3%)
6	I can consciously alter my frame of mind or mood?	71 (44.3%)	89 (55.6%)
7	Others can tell the mood I am in	113 (70.6%)	49 (30.6%)
8	I am good at reconciling differences with other people?	90 (56.2%)	70 (43.3%)

The data in table 1 sheds light on the emotional intelligence disposition of students residing in Queen Idia Hall, particularly in terms of managing emotions, empathizing with others, and handling interpersonal dynamics. For instance, most students (68.7%) agreed that they quickly let go of anger, suggesting a strong ability to manage and move past negative emotions. However, 31.2% found it challenging to let go of anger, which may impact their emotional well-being. Additionally, a significant majority (87.5%) reported that difficult people do not annoy them, indicating resilience in dealing with challenging individuals, an important aspect of emotional stability within a shared living environment.

In terms of self-awareness, 54.3% of students indicated that they can recognize when someone has upset or annoyed them, while 45.6% struggle with this awareness. This suggested that while a little over half of the students are aware of emotional triggers, a substantial number might not be as conscious of the source of their emotions. Similarly, when it comes to being aware of their own emotional states, 56.2% of the students reported awareness when they feel emotional, though 43% are less conscious of these states, reflecting a divide in emotional self-perception among the residents.

Empathy also appeared to be a notable strength, with 68.7% of students stated that they were excellent at empathizing with others' problems. This high level of empathy indicated a supportive community where students were likely to be understanding of each other's challenges. On the other hand, a substantial minority (31.3%) felt less confident in their empathic abilities, which could affect interpersonal relationships within the hall.

However, when it comes to altering their mood or mental state consciously, only 44.3% of students reported this ability, with a majority (55.6%) indicated difficulty in doing so. This suggested that many students may struggle with consciously managing their emotions, potentially impacting their capacity to navigate stressful situations. Furthermore, 70.6% of students felt that others can easily discern their mood, while 30.6% were unsure or disagreed, suggesting that emotional expression was relatively visible among the majority of students, potentially facilitating better mutual understanding. Additionally, a majority of students (56.2%) reported being adept at reconciling differences with others, although 43.7% felt less confident in resolving conflicts, highlighting a need for improved conflict-resolution skills among a significant portion of the residents.

These findings revealed that while many students in Queen Idia Hall possess considerable emotional intelligence skills such as letting go of anger, empathizing with others, and maintaining resilience with difficult people there are areas for growth, particularly in self-awareness, conscious mood regulation, and conflict resolution. These insights could be valuable for developing support programmes or workshops to enhance emotional intelligence and interpersonal skills among the students

### **Discussion of findings**

Halgin and Whitbourne (2003) described stress as an unpleasant reaction to perceived threats, leading to heightened physiological responses, which may disrupt cognitive functioning. When students experience high levels of stress, their emotional intelligence (EI) can be compromised, resulting in poorer academic performance and strained interpersonal relationships. This finding supports the assertion by Myers (2005) that stress is a psychological and physiological reaction that affects one's ability to manage and respond effectively to daily challenges. Moreover, the link between emotional intelligence and students' mental and cognitive abilities reinforces the significance of EI as a tool for managing life's unavoidable stressors, as highlighted by Nweze (2005). Since emotional intelligence enables students to recognize and regulate their emotions, it improves their resilience against stress, allowing them to better manage challenging periods in both academic and social contexts. This aligns with Volpe's (2000) view that stressors, or situations that test one's adaptability, can be effectively managed by emotionally intelligent individuals, who are likely to maintain balance and avoid emotional breakdowns.

The importance of recognizing individual differences in stress responses and emotional intelligence also resonates with Volpe's (2000) definition of stressors, emphasizing the need to approach each person uniquely. Emotional intelligence aids students in showing empathy, managing their own emotions, and interacting more positively with others, thus reducing stress and improving social dynamics. Finally, the finding that higher levels of emotional intelligence correlate with lower stress levels is consistent with Lim (2020), who noted that emotional intelligence enables individuals to manage demanding circumstances more effectively. By focusing on EI development, students can cultivate better stress-management strategies, ultimately enhancing their academic and interpersonal experiences.



## Conclusion

The findings of this study provide a comprehensive overview of the stress experiences and emotional intelligence disposition of students residing in Queen Idia Hall. It was discovered that many students experienced stress levels. Common indicators of stress included feelings of being overwhelmed, difficulty relaxing, trouble sleeping, and emotional exhaustion. These stressors were particularly evident around academic deadlines. They also demonstrated fairly good emotional intelligence. Skills such as the ability to let go of anger, empathize with others, and manage interpersonal relationships were commonly reported. The following recommendations were made :

1. The university should organise workshops and seminars aimed at enhancing students' emotional intelligence, especially focusing on mood regulation, self-awareness, and conflict resolution.
2. Counselling centers should provide regular stress management sessions that teach coping strategies such as mindfulness, relaxation techniques, and time management skills.
3. Establish student-led support groups where students can share experiences and coping strategies, fostering a sense of community and emotional support.
4. Faculty should consider flexible deadlines or reduced academic load for students identified as experiencing high stress, to reduce performance pressure.
5. Increase access to psychological counselling services for students experiencing high stress or emotional difficulties.
6. Conduct periodic assessments of students' stress levels and emotional well-being to identify those at risk and provide early intervention.
7. Encourage students to maintain balanced diets, exercise regularly, and get adequate sleep, all of which are essential in managing stress.
8. Introduce emotional intelligence development into the general studies curriculum to ensure all students acquire essential emotional coping skills.

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