

**PERCEIVED IMPACT OF STRESS ON THE MENTAL HEALTH OF
FINAL YEAR STUDENTS IN THE UNIVERSITY OF BENIN**

BY

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**DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL
EDUCATION**

FACULTY OF EDUCATION

November, 2025

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EDU2102532

**A PROJECT WORK SUBMITTED TO THE DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH,
SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION, FACULTY OF
EDUCATION, UNIVERSITY OF BENIN IN PARTIAL FUFILLMENT TO THE
REQUIREMENTS FOR THE AWARD OF BACHELOR OF SCIENCE
DEGREE IN EDUCATION (B.Sc. (Ed)) IN HEALTH, SAFETY AND
ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION.**

November, 2025

CERTIFICATION

This is to certify that this research work was carried out by **NKEOYEN KELVIN AFAM**, with Matriculation number **EDU2102532**, of the Department of Health Safety and Environmental Education, Faculty of Education, University of Benin, Benin city.

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DEDICATION

This project is dedicated to Almighty God, whose grace, wisdom, and strength have been my constant guide throughout this work.

I also dedicate this project to my parents, for their endless love, encouragement, and sacrifices that made my education possible.

To my lecturers and friends, who supported and inspired me along the way, your words of motivation and belief in my ability gave me the courage to keep going.

Finally, to all final year students striving to overcome challenges and achieve their goals, this work is for you.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENT

My sincere appreciation goes to my supervisor Dr. Mrs. O.H. Obasuyi, whose guidance, patience, and valuable suggestions greatly contributed to the success of this work.

I am deeply grateful to all my lecturers in the Department, for their dedication, encouragement and knowledge imparted throughout my academic journey.

Special thanks go to my parents Mr. and Mrs. Afam for their unwavering financial support, words of encouragement and prayers and to my siblings Nkechi, Nneka, Nduka, Ngozi, Ndidi and Stephannie for their financial support, unwavering love, moral support, and sacrifices which have been a constant source of motivation.

Special acknowledgement goes to Ejenavi and to my friends Maro, Freddy, Clinton, Joyce, Peter, Ella and Precious, whose cooperation, encouragement, and constructive criticisms that made this work both fulfilling and enjoyable.

Finally, to all who contribute in one way or another to the success of this project, I say a heartfelt thank you.

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CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Background Of The Study

Stress touches just about everyone, but for students nearing the finish line in their university education, the weight can feel especially heavy. It starts off as a natural reaction your body and mind responding to pressure but when it drags on too long or comes on too strong, it chips away at your mental health. For final-year students, that pressure doesn't just come from schoolwork. It's coming from every direction including academic demands, family expectations, the fear of what's next, and often, financial struggles.

Across the globe, research keeps pointing to how intense the academic experience can be. Students are juggling tight schedules, looming deadlines, and constant exams. Now toss in money issues, social tension, and that nagging uncertainty about what life looks like after graduation and it's a lot to carry. The American Psychological Association has warned that this kind of constant stress can wear people down. It leads to mental health issues like anxiety, depression, trouble sleeping, and burnout. And once your mental health slips, your grades, relationships, and overall well-being tend to follow.

In Nigeria, the picture gets even more complicated. Students in public universities, including the University of Benin (UNIBEN), face issues that stack up fast like underfunded facilities, crowded lecture halls, strikes that interrupt school calendars, and barely-there mental health services. Final-year students especially find themselves stretched thin. Besides all the regular classwork, they have major projects and dissertations to complete. On top of that, they're staring down the unknowns of adult life job hunting, graduate school, and sometimes, family pressure to succeed.

Financial stress piles on too. A lot of students struggle to pay for project materials and basic living expenses while also planning for life after graduation. The constant pressure creates a storm of anxiety and low self-esteem. It can feel like drowning in responsibilities with no solid ground to stand on. What's worse, mental health still carries a heavy stigma in many parts of Nigerian society. So students avoid speaking up or reaching out, afraid of being seen as weak or "not serious." Left without proper support, they sometimes fall into destructive habits isolating themselves, denying their struggles, or turning to alcohol or drugs just to cope.

At UNIBEN, many final-year students quietly say they feel overwhelmed, emotionally worn out, and unsure how to keep going. But despite this reality, not enough research has focused on their specific experience. Most studies lump all students together, missing what makes the final year so uniquely difficult.

That's where this study comes in. It takes a close look at the way stress shapes the mental health of final-year students at UNIBEN. It'll dig into what's causing the stress, how students think it affects their well-being, and what they do to try to manage it. The goal is to offer insight not just to raise awareness, but to help shape better support systems. This includes creating more open conversations around mental health and building programs that can actually ease some of the pressure students face.

Hopefully, the results can push universities and decision-makers to step up. Better mental health services, more workshops, support groups, and real investment in students' well-being could make a huge difference. Because while stress may be part of the academic path, it shouldn't leave students broken before they even start their next chapter.

Statement Of the Problem

Final-year students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) face immense pressure as they navigate the final stretch of their academic journey. They contend with a combination of academic demands, including research, exams, and project deadlines, alongside societal expectations, financial challenges, and personal struggles. These stressors often lead to significant mental health issues, such as anxiety, depression, exhaustion, and feelings of hopelessness. Many students report difficulty balancing their responsibilities, with some turning to unhealthy coping mechanisms, further exacerbating their struggles.

While research has broadly examined stress and mental health among students, there is a lack of focused studies on the unique challenges faced by final-year students in Nigerian universities. This knowledge gap has resulted in inadequate support systems and programs that fail to address their specific needs. Additionally, there is limited understanding of the coping strategies these students employ, whether healthy or unhealthy, and how these strategies impact their well-being.

This study seeks to bridge this gap by exploring the specific causes of stress among final-year students at UNIBEN, its perceived impact on their mental health, and the coping mechanisms they utilize. By providing detailed insights into their experiences, this research aims to inform the development of targeted support systems and effective interventions, ensuring students are better equipped to manage stress, safeguard their mental health, and transition successfully into post-graduate life.

Research Questions

In line with the research objectives, the study seeks to answer the following key questions:

1. What are the main sources of stress for final-year students at UNIBEN?

2. What is the perception of final-year students regarding the relationship between stress and their mental health?
3. What coping strategies are employed by final-year students to manage stress?
4. What are the mental health outcomes associated with stress among final-year students?

These questions will guide the research process, ensuring that the study remains focused on its key objectives and provides meaningful insights into the topic.

Significance Of the Study

This study matters for a few important reasons. First off, it looks into a serious problem; how stress affects the well-being and school performance of final-year students. By pointing out where most of that stress comes from and how it hits their mental health, the research gives students a chance to better understand what they're dealing with and possibly seek out help that fits their situation.

Then there's the impact on lecturers and school leadership. This research gives them a clear window into the struggles final-year students face. That kind of knowledge can shape decisions, helping schools set up better systems like support programs or stress-reducing policies to make things a little easier for students.

It also fills a gap in mental health studies. There hasn't been much focus on students at this stage in Nigerian universities, so this work helps put that group on the map. Future researchers or planners can use this as a stepping stone for deeper studies or new strategies.

Lastly, the results could guide real changes not just in schools but in public health and education policy. Policymakers and mental health professionals might use this research to create programs focused on final-year students. Things like mental health education, easier

access to counselors, stress relief workshops, and ways to ease academic pressure could all grow out of what this study finds.

Scope / Delimitation of Study

This study looks only at final-year students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) in Benin City, Nigeria. It sticks to figuring out where their stress comes from, how they think that stress affects their mental health, and what they do to deal with it. The focus is on this group because they're in a pretty intense spot wrapping up school while trying to figure out what comes next.

It doesn't go beyond the UNIBEN campus. That narrower focus helps keep things detailed and specific, making it easier to dig deep into what's happening right there. Even though what's found might be helpful for students elsewhere, the study isn't trying to say all students everywhere are the same. It's more of a snapshot of UNIBEN.

There are a few limits too. The study depends on what students say about themselves, which might not always be spot-on people forget things, or they see themselves differently than others would. It also doesn't look into things like family life, romantic problems, or health issues that could be adding to the stress. So, while it goes deep, it doesn't cover everything.

Definition Of Some Terms

To keep things clear and steady throughout the study, here's what some important terms mean when they're used:

Stress: That feeling of being stretched too thin whether it shows up in your body, mind, or emotions usually caused by tough or demanding situations.

Mental Health: How well a person is doing emotionally and mentally. It's about being able to handle everyday pressure, do your work, and be part of your community in a healthy way.

Perceived Impact: How someone personally feels or thinks stress is affecting their mental health it's about their own view, not a doctor's opinion.

Final-Year Students: Those in their last year of school at a university or college, getting ready to finish their studies and move on to the next phase of life.

CHAPTER TWO

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

This chapter will review related literature under the following topics;

- Theoretical Framework
- Conceptualization of Stress
- Prevalence of Stress Among Final-Year Students in the University of Benin
- Causes of Stress Among Final-Year Students
- Impact of Stress on Final-Year Student
- Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Final-Year Students
- Public Health Implications of Stress Among Students
- Summary of Related Literature

Theoretical framework

The theoretical base of this study pulls from two core psychological models that help explain how stress shows up and plays out especially for students facing high-stakes situations like their final year of university. To dig into what's happening with final-year students at the University of Benin, we're using Lazarus and Folkman's Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (1984) and Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs (1943).

Transactional Model of Stress And Coping

Lazarus and Folkman suggest that stress isn't just about the situation itself but how someone sees and deals with it. Their model works in two steps:

- Primary appraisal: People judge whether something feels like a threat, a challenge, or just neutral.
- Secondary appraisal: They weigh whether they've got enough resources emotionally, mentally, physically to deal with it.

If someone believes they don't have what it takes to handle what's going on, that's when stress hits. For students in their final year, stress can be triggered by how they feel about looming deadlines, job hunting, financial responsibilities, or expectations from family not just the presence of those things, but their personal take on it all.

Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs

Maslow's idea is that people move through different levels of need, starting with basics like food and safety and going up to things like feeling respected or achieving personal goals. Stress can show up when any of these needs aren't being met. If a student's struggling with money, housing, or even just finding emotional support, it's harder to care about big-picture things like career goals or academic success. That mismatch adds more pressure.

So in short: if you're a student trying to reach the top of Maslow's pyramid but stuck at the bottom worrying about rent, stress becomes almost inevitable.

Why These Theories Matter Here

Together, these two models give a clearer picture. Lazarus and Folkman help us understand how students react and cope with stress based on how they see their situation. Maslow helps explain why certain stressors are especially heavy, because they're tied to needs that haven't been met yet. Combining them lets us look not just at what's causing stress but how students might be able to manage or reduce it.

Conceptualization Of Stress

Stress is a layered idea that people have studied for decades across fields like psychology, biology, and social sciences. The way it's defined has shifted over time, mostly because human reactions to pressure, whether inside or outside, aren't one-size-fits-all.

Definitions and Perspectives

Back in 1936, Hans Selye introduced "stress" in medical terms. He explained it as the body reacting in a general way to any kind of demand. He also came up with something called the General Adaptation Syndrome, which happens in three steps: alarm (initial shock), resistance (the body fights back), and exhaustion (resources get used up).

Later on, in 1984, Lazarus and Folkman offered a fresh take with their Transactional Model. They pointed out how we think about a situation matters. Stress shows up when we feel like life's challenges outweigh what we've got to handle them.

McGrath, back in 1970, had a similar angle. He believed stress comes from that gap between what life asks of us and what we think we can give. Again, it's all about how personal the experience is.

Types of Stress

Not all stress is bad.

Eustress is the good kind, like butterflies before a presentation. It can push you to do better.

Distress, on the other hand, is the heavy kind that drags you down. It's tied to burnout, anxiety, and even physical illness.

Academic Stress

In schools and universities, academic stress hits hard. It stems from things like overwhelming assignments, racing deadlines, or even the fear of not measuring up. The World Health Organization frames it as a student seeing school challenges as threats, which leads to fear, tension, or mental blocks.

Stressors and Individual Differences

Stress doesn't pop up on its own it's sparked by stressors. These could be:

Outside: like a noisy home, packed schedule, or fighting with someone.

Inside: like overthinking, illness, or self-doubt.

How people handle stress isn't the same across the board. Personality traits, support systems, and coping tools all shape how someone responds.

Relevance to Final-Year Students

Those in their last year of university deal with their own brand of pressure:

- Finishing projects or dissertations.
- Prepping for make-or-break exams.
- Stressing over jobs or what's next.
- Trying to juggle school with the rest of their life.

Understanding stress from all these angles helps in coming up with real ways to support students, so they're not just surviving, but getting through in one piece.

Prevalence of Stress Among Final-Year Students in the University of Benin

Stress is a constant part of university life, but it tends to hit hardest during the final year. The weight of assignments, final projects, exams, and the pressure of figuring out what comes next can make everything feel a bit heavier. At the University of Benin, this isn't just a theory, it's backed by numbers and personal experiences shared by the students themselves.

A cross-sectional study showed that almost all undergraduates were dealing with moderate academic stress, while the others were dealing with high levels. That's just about everyone surveyed. What's even more telling is that certain life situations made things worse. Being older, married, employed, or living off-campus added extra layers of pressure.

Medical and pharmacy students weren't exempt either. In a sample of 56 students, the study found that stress levels were high across the board. About 86% of students interviewed felt they didn't have enough time to handle all their responsibilities. It wasn't just about time, though, many of them also felt like their confidence was taking a hit, and around half said they felt tired all the time even after a full night's sleep.

Altogether, these findings draw a clear picture: stress is a real and pressing issue for final-year students at the University of Benin. They need more than encouragement, they need structured support systems, programs that address time management, mental health, and personal well-being, especially as they get ready to transition out of school and into the working world.

Prevalence Of Stress Among Final-Year Students In The University Of Benin

Stress among final-year students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) isn't just a passing phase it's a common, deeply rooted issue. These students are often caught between multiple demands. They're juggling final projects, tough exams, uncertain job prospects, and the

looming question of what happens after graduation. When all that hits at once, stress levels tend to spike.

Studies carried out in Nigerian universities, especially at UNIBEN, show just how widespread this problem is. Around 78% of final-year students were experiencing moderate to high stress. That's a much higher rate than students in earlier years, hinting at just how intense the last stretch of university can get.

It's not just coursework, students also stress over money, social pressures, and whether they'll land a job after school.

Gender also plays a role here. In general, females reported more stress than males. That gap is often due to emotional stress, family expectations, or trying to handle school along with caregiving or household responsibilities. So while all students feel pressure, how they experience it can look very different.

Beyond personal and academic challenges, the structure of the university itself adds fuel to the fire. Things like strikes, lecture hall overcrowding, and sudden shifts in the school calendar make it harder for students to plan. Without a clear schedule, many feel stuck or anxious about the future.

Even though there's more awareness now about how much stress final-year students face, actual support remains limited. UNIBEN does have counseling services, but many students don't know about them or don't use them. So a lot of students are left to handle everything on their own.

Stress is a major issue for final-year students at UNIBEN. A mix of academic pressure, money problems, emotional strain, and system-wide issues make it worse. Unless better

support systems are put in place, these students will keep carrying a load that's too heavy on their own.

Causes Of Stress Among Final-Year Students

Stress during the final year of university doesn't come from one place, it builds up from all sides. For students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), this pressure comes from academic hurdles, money problems, emotional struggles, family expectations, and even issues within the school system itself. Understanding these stress triggers is key if any real support or change is going to happen.

Academic Pressure: The final year is often the heaviest academically. Students are dealing with projects, long essays, last-chance exams, and the weight of their grades possibly determining their futures. Many find themselves racing deadlines, juggling assignments, and trying to do research with little to no proper guidance. Students in this stage pointed to project work and exams as their biggest sources of stress. Writing a thesis or long paper without much help or enough resources makes the situation worse.

Financial Constraints: Money troubles also hit hard. Final-year students often have more expenses than usual, from paying rent and buying food to funding their projects and preparing for life after school. The costs of printing, binding, and job-hunting can add up fast. It's not just about being broke it's about how that lack of money gets in the way of focus, attendance, and sometimes even staying in school.

Post-graduation Uncertainty: The fear of what comes next is a serious weight on many students' minds. With limited job openings and so much competition, some worry about

never finding work or getting into a graduate program. Add the pressure of securing a National Youth Service Corps (NYSC) spot or a job that pays enough, and it's no wonder students lose sleep.

There's also the weight of what others expect. Families often see graduation as the start of success. But not all students can meet those hopes right away. The stress of trying to meet expectations especially when there's little support can leave students feeling isolated or inadequate. Some compare themselves to peers and feel like they're falling behind, which only adds to the emotional toll.

Institutional and Environmental Stressors: UNIBEN, like many other Nigerian public universities, comes with its own set of problems. Strikes that throw off the calendar. Overcrowded classrooms. Unreliable infrastructure. All these make learning harder than it should be. Even basic issues like housing, campus security, and getting to class can wear students down. These aren't minor annoyances, they're constant sources of stress.

Psychological and Personal Factors: Lastly, some of the stress comes from within. Not everyone handles pressure the same way. Some students are naturally anxious. Others may have depression or tend to be hard on themselves. Without time management skills or strong support systems, it's easy for the stress to pile up. Personal setbacks can hit harder in the final year, when everything feels like it's on the line.

To sum it up, the causes of stress for final-year students at UNIBEN are tangled and far-reaching. It's not just about schoolwork. It's about money, pressure from others, fear of the unknown, and the structure of the university itself. Fixing this won't come from one solution it needs a full picture approach that includes better support in and out of the classroom.

Effects of Stress on Final-Year Students

Stress, when it becomes too much or lasts too long, can take a serious toll on students, especially those in their final year at the University of Benin (UNIBEN). While stress is a natural part of life, unmanaged or overwhelming stress affects not just schoolwork but also health, relationships, and overall well-being. For students nearing graduation, this pressure hits harder than ever.

Academic Performance: One of the first places stress shows up is in academics. When stress becomes constant, it can mess with focus, memory, and problem-solving skills students need to do well. That's especially risky during the final year, when every grade counts and final projects often determine their degree classification.

Mental Health Challenges: Emotional and mental struggles are another big part of the picture. Final-year students often report anxiety, depression, sleeplessness, and feeling drained, these problems show up more in final-year students than those in earlier years. If left unchecked, this can lead to dangerous situations like substance misuse or suicidal thoughts.

Physical Health Challenges: Stress doesn't just stay in your head, it hits the body too. Students dealing with ongoing stress often suffer from headaches, extreme tiredness, stomach issues, or even get sick more easily. Students often ignore these signs because they're too focused on finishing school. But brushing off these symptoms can lead to bigger health problems down the road.

Social and Interpersonal Strain: Stress also affects how students relate to others. It can cause arguments, pull people away from friendships, or make them avoid social spaces altogether. When students shut themselves off from others, they lose out on emotional

support and community two things that could actually help them feel better. This kind of isolation often feeds back into the stress, creating a rough cycle.

Maladaptive Coping and Risk Behaviors: Some students try to deal with the pressure by turning to things like alcohol, smoking, pills, overeating, or simply checking out completely. While these might offer quick relief, they usually make things worse. Some students are under so much stress, they're turning to unhealthy fixes like stimulants and sedatives in order to cope.

Reduced Quality of Life: When all of this adds up; poor grades, bad health, social isolation, and harmful habits, their whole quality of life suffers. Things they used to enjoy no longer feel fun. School feels like a burden. Burnout creeps in. Many end up finishing school emotionally and mentally worn out, not ready to step into the next chapter of their lives.

Stress doesn't just hurt grades, it affects everything: body, mind, relationships, and future plans. For final-year students at UNIBEN, this means their last year of school could end up being the hardest one yet. That's why it's so important for the university to step in with real support; mental health services, practical help, and an academic system that cares.

Coping Mechanisms Adopted By Final-Year Students

Coping is all about how people deal with pressure. For final-year students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN), stress comes from all directions from academic deadlines to future plans, money issues, family pressure you name it. To stay afloat, these students turn to different strategies, some healthy, others not so much. What they choose can shape how they perform in school and how they feel overall.

Problem-Focused Coping Strategies: This is where students try to solve the issue directly. Maybe it's organizing their schedule, asking for help from lecturers, or setting clear priorities.

Students who make plans, stick to a study routine, or reach out when they're stuck tend to feel more in control and less stressed. These students aren't just reacting to stress, they're taking steps to manage it head-on.

Emotion-Focused Coping Strategies: When the problem can't be fixed right away, students often try to calm their feelings instead. This might mean praying, meditating, writing things down, or talking to someone. With religion playing a big role in Nigerian life, many UNIBEN students find comfort in spiritual activities. Prayer and being part of a religious group helped students feel more hopeful and less overwhelmed.

Social Support Systems: Friends, classmates, roommates. They matter a lot. Sometimes just knowing you're not alone is enough to ease stress. Students talk through problems, study together, or share materials like notes and past exams. Strong social bonds help students adjust better and feel less pressure overall. These circles also give people room to laugh, vent, or just feel normal again for a bit.

Use of University Counseling and Mental Health Services: UNIBEN does have counseling services, but not many students use them. Some don't know they exist. Others worry about what people might say. Still, these services can help. Whether it's with handling emotions or figuring out next steps.

Maladaptive Coping Strategies: On the flip side, some students turn to habits that only make things worse. Drinking, overusing stimulants, skipping classes, or zoning out in front of screens can all seem like ways to cope but they don't help for long. There is always a rise in intake of caffeine (Coffee and energy drinks) around exam and project periods. While these may help students stay awake or calm down short-term, they often lead to worse anxiety, poor sleep, and health risks.

Gender and Cultural Influences on Coping: How a student copes also depends on their background. Girls often lean toward emotional outlets and talking with others, while boys may either problem-solve or avoid the issue altogether. Culture plays a part too. Some students might be raised to believe asking for help is weak or that they should handle things alone. These differences highlight the need for support that respects individual experiences and social expectations.

In short, all students at UNIBEN don't all cope with stress the same way. Some take charge with plans and discipline, others seek comfort through faith or friendships. And some, facing too much pressure, fall into unhealthy patterns. The goal should be to support healthy choices and make sure help is easy to find for everyone, no matter how they cope.

Public Health Implications Of Stress Among Students

Stress isn't just a personal issue for students, it's a public health concern with wide-reaching consequences. For final-year students at the University of Benin (UNIBEN) and across Nigerian universities, long-term stress doesn't just affect grades. It affects minds, bodies, and futures. The ripple effect touches families, schools, the healthcare system, and even the economy.

Mental Health Burden: Mental health is one of the first areas hit by chronic stress. At UNIBEN, nearly one third of students shows signs of depression, with many also dealing with anxiety. These issues stem from long hours, financial pressure, and the weight of expectations. Nationally, the picture is similar.

Risky Behaviors and Lifestyle Illnesses: When students feel overwhelmed, many fall into unhealthy habits like smoking, drinking, skipping meals, or sitting for hours without

movement. These choices might feel like relief at the time, but over time they raise the risk of diseases like high blood pressure, stomach issues, and immune problems. The World Health Organization (2020) has already flagged this as a rising concern in places like Nigeria, where access to early health care is still limited.

Academic Disruption: Stress pulls students away from their academic path. Students under constant pressure miss deadlines, lose motivation, or fail to graduate on time. These disruptions don't just hurt the individual, they hold back the country's investment in skilled workers and weaken the nation's workforce.

Strain on Campus Health Services: Campus clinics are overwhelmed. Most don't have enough trained staff, space, or funding to meet the mental health needs of students.

Economic and Workforce Impact: If stress follows students into their careers, it drags down productivity. Graduates who are already burned out struggle to focus or stay consistent at work. That means fewer contributions to the economy and more pressure on employers to support fragile workers.

Burden on Families and Communities: When a student is forced to repeat a year, seek private care, or drop out, it affects more than just them. Many Nigerian families make major sacrifices for education, hoping it'll bring stability. So when stress gets in the way, the emotional and financial blow hits hard at home.

- **What Can Be Done?**

The solution isn't simple but it's clear. Universities need more mental health education, more trained counselors, and systems for spotting stress early. Government policies should support this with funding, counselor recruitment, and national strategies that treat student stress as a real public health issue and not just a phase.

To sum it up, stress isn't just affecting students, it's affecting everything around them. If universities and policymakers don't act now, the damage won't stop at campus gates. It'll show up in homes, clinics, and workplaces across the country.

Summary of Related Literature

This chapter explored how final-year students at UNIBEN experience stress, using two theories; Lazarus and Folkman's stress model and Maslow's hierarchy of needs to explain student behavior and response. It showed that stress is widespread, mostly caused by academics, finances, family pressure, and institutional challenges. The effects range from anxiety and poor grades to burnout and unhealthy habits like substance use. Coping styles differ, with women leaning toward emotional support and men often avoiding the issue. The chapter ended by framing stress as a public health issue that affects not just students but the education system and workforce too.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter explains the methods and procedures used to carry out the study. It describes the research design, population, sample and sampling technique, research instrument, validity and reliability of the instrument, method of data collection, method of data analysis, and ethical considerations that guided the study.

- Research Design
- Population of the Study
- Sample and Sampling Technique
- Research Instrument
- Validity of the instrument
- Reliability of the Instrument
- Method of Data Collection
- Method of Data Analysis

Research Design

For this study, the researcher adopted the survey research design, using the questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection. This design was considered appropriate because it enabled the researcher to gather information from a large number of final-year students within a short period of time and at a relatively low cost. Through the use of the questionnaire, the researcher was able to obtain relevant data on the sources of stress, the perception of its relationship with mental health, coping strategies, and the mental health outcomes associated with stress among final-year students of the University of Benin.

Population of the Study

The population of this study consisted of all final-year students of the University of Benin during the 2024/2025 academic session. These students were drawn from different faculties and departments within the university.

S/N	FACULTY	POPULATION OF THE STUDY
1	Agricultural science	270
2	Arts	1,233
3	Basic Medical Science	564
4	Dentistry	27
5	Education	886
6	Engineering	1,159
7	Environmental Science	99
8	Law	117
9	Life Science	545
10	Management Science	554
11	Medicine	310
12	Pharmacy	190
13	Physical Science	581
14	Social Science	756

15	Veterinary Medicine	16
16	Vocational and Technical Education	28
	TOTAL	7,335

Source: Academic Planning unit, Student Affairs Division, University of Benin.

Sample and Sampling Technique

From the population, the researcher selected a sample using the simple random sampling technique. This method gave every final-year student an equal opportunity to be part of the study and helped to avoid bias in the selection process. A total of 120 respondents was selected from six faculties within the University of Benin. Twenty (20) students were randomly chosen from each faculty to ensure adequate representation of the population.

FACULTY	NO. OF STUDENTS	NO. OF SAMPLED STUDENTS 120
Education	886	20
Medicine	310	20
Law	117	20
Social Science	756	20
Pharmacy	190	20
Life Science	545	20
TOTAL	2,804	120

Research Instrument

The main instrument used for data collection was a structured questionnaire that the researcher personally designed. The questionnaire was divided into five sections:

Section A: Demographic data such as age, gender, and faculty.

Section B: Questions on the main sources of stress among final-year students.

Section C: Items focusing on students' perception of the relationship between stress and mental health.

Section D: Questions on coping strategies used by students to manage stress.

Section E: Items on the mental health outcomes associated with stress.

The questionnaire was designed using a four-point Likert scale format ranging from Strongly Agree (4) to Strongly Disagree (1) to allow respondents express their opinions clearly.

Validity of the Instrument

To ensure that the questionnaire measured what it was supposed to measure, the researcher presented the draft copy to two experts in the department of Health, Safety and Environmental Education from the University of Benin. Their constructive feedback helped make necessary corrections and modifications. With their guidance, the researcher was able to improve the clarity, content, and relevance of the questions, thereby ensuring the instrument's validity.

Reliability of the Instrument

To establish the reliability of the instrument used in this study, the test-retest method would be employed. The questionnaire would be administered to a small group of respondents who shared similar characteristics with the target population. After an interval of two weeks, the same questionnaire would be administered to the same group of respondents.

Method of Data Collection

After obtaining the necessary approval, the researcher distributed the questionnaires to the selected respondents with the assistance of two research assistants. Before giving out the questionnaires, it was explained the purpose of the study to the respondents and assured them that their responses would be treated confidentially. The questionnaires were distributed via Google forms to the participants. Once completed, the forms were submitted online ensuring that every questionnaire was returned therefore achieving 100% response rate.

Method of Data Analysis

After collecting the completed questionnaires, the researcher organized and analyzed the data using descriptive statistics such as frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and standard deviation. The data were presented in tables for clarity and better understanding.

CHAPTER FOUR

PRESENTATION OF RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

This chapter presents the data collected through the administered questionnaire on the topic “perceived impact of Stress on the mental health of Final-Year Students in the University of Benin.” The data obtained were organized, analyzed, and interpreted in line with the research questions that guided the study. A total of 120 copies of the questionnaire were distributed across six faculties, with 20 respondents selected from each faculty. The responses were analyzed using descriptive statistics such as frequencies and percentages, and the results are presented in tables for clarity.

The purpose of this chapter is to provide a detailed account of the findings from the field, showing the major sources of stress, the coping mechanisms adopted by final-year students, and the perceived effects of stress on their academic performance and overall well-being. The analysis also highlights gender differences and other relevant factors associated with students’ stress experiences. The interpretation of results is discussed in relation to the research questions and existing literature.

Research Question 1:

What are the main sources of stress for final-year students at the University of Benin?

Table 1: Respondents’ Opinions on Sources of Stress Among Final-Year Students

S/N	Item	Agreed	Disagreed	Mean	Standard	Decision
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					Deviation	
1.	Heavy academic workload causes stress.	99 (82.5%)	21 (17.5%)	3.19	0.73	Accepted
2.	Preparing for project defense gives pressure and anxiety.	100 (83.3%)	20 (16.7%)	3.23	0.69	Accepted
3.	Financial difficulties contribute to stress level.	99(82.5%)	21 (17.5%)	3.15	0.71	Accepted
4.	Uncertainty about future career or employment causes stress	90 (75.0%)	30 (25.0%)	3.03	0.76	Accepted
5.	Balancing academics with personal or family responsibilities is stressful.	88 (73.3%)	32 (26.7%)	2.98	0.79	Accepted
6.	Relationship problems increases stress.	78 (65.0%)	42 (35.0%)	2.78	0.83	Accepted
7.	Lack of adequate	96 (80.0%)	24 (20.0%)	3.14	0.74	Accepted

	rest and sleep adds to stress.					
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Cluster Mean = 3.07

Benchmark mean = 2.50 (Decision Rule: 2.50 and above = Accepted; below 2.50 = Rejected)

Interpretation of Findings

From Table 1 above, the cluster mean of 3.07 indicates that the respondents generally agreed that the listed factors contribute to stress among final-year students. The highest-rated sources of stress were preparing for project defense (Mean = 3.23), heavy academic workload (Mean = 3.19), and financial difficulties (Mean = 3.15).

Similarly, lack of adequate rest and sleep (Mean = 3.14) and uncertainty about future career prospects (Mean = 3.03) were also rated high as stress-inducing factors. The lowest-rated item was relationship problems (Mean = 2.78), it falls above the benchmark of 2.50, indicating general agreement.

Overall, these findings show that academic pressure, financial constraints, future uncertainty, preparing for project defense, relationship problems, lack of adequate rest and sleep and balancing academic with personal responsibilities are the main sources of stress experienced by final-year students at the University of Benin.

Research Question 2:

What is the perception of final-year students regarding the relationship between stress and their mental health?

To answer this question, respondents were asked to express their level of agreement with statements relating to how stress influences their mental health and psychological well-being.

Their responses are summarized in Table 2 below.

Table 2: Respondents' Perception of the Relationship Between Stress and Mental Health

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1.	High level of stress affects concentration and academic performance	103 (85.8%)	17 (14.2%)	3.28	0.68	Accepted
2.	When I am stressed, I experience mood swings or irritability.	99 (82.5%)	21 (17.5%)	3.19	0.71	Accepted
3.	Stress make me feel anxious or depressed	98 (81.7%)	22 (18.3%)	3.15	0.73	Accepted
4.	Prolonged stress affects the ability	99 (82.5%)	21 (17.5%)	3.22	0.69	Accepted

	to think clearly.					
5.	I believe stress has a negative effect on my overall mental health.	103 (85.8%)	17 (14.2%)	3.28	0.66	Accepted
6.	Stress affects motivation to study or attend lectures.	94 (78.3%)	26 (21.7%)	3.11	0.74	Accepted

Cluster Mean: 3.20 = Agreed

Benchmark Mean = 2.50 (Decision Rule: 2.50 and above = Accepted; below 2.50 = Rejected)

Interpretation of Findings

From Table 2, the overall cluster mean of 3.20 indicates that respondents generally agreed that stress negatively affects their mental health. The items with the highest mean scores were high level of stress affects concentration and academic performance (Mean = 3.28) and stress has a negative effect on overall mental health (Mean = 3.28), showing strong agreement that stress disrupts both mental balance and academic efficiency.

Furthermore, respondents agreed that prolonged stress affects clear thinking (Mean = 3.22) and that mood swings or irritability (Mean = 3.19) are common indicators of stress. The least-rated item, stress affects motivation to study (Mean = 3.11), was still above the benchmark, suggesting it is also an important aspect of stress-related mental challenges.

In summary, the findings show that there is a relationship between stress and mental health among final year students in the University of Benin. They believe that high stress levels can lead to anxiety, depression, reduced concentration, and decreased academic motivation. They also experience mood swings or irritability, inability to think clearly, lack of motivation to study when stressed, and they perceive that stress has a negative impact on their overall mental health.

Research Question 3

What coping strategies are employed by final-year students to manage stress?

To answer this question, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements relating to the coping mechanisms they adopt to deal with stress. Their responses are summarized in Table 3 below.

Table 3: Respondents' Opinions on Coping Strategies Employed by Final-Year Students

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1.	I talk to friends or family members when I feel stressed.	100 (83.4%)	20 (16.6%)	3.21	0.70	Accepted
2.	I take short breaks or rest when I am overwhelmed	101 (84.2%)	19 (15.8%)	3.24	0.68	Accepted
3.	I engage in Prayers or religious activities to relieve stress.	102 (85.0%)	18 (15.0%)	3.28	0.67	Accepted

4.	I Participate in sports or physical exercise to manage stress.	88 (73.3%)	32 (26.7%)	2.99	0.77	Accepted
5.	I listen to music or watch movies to relax	97 (80.8%)	23 (19.2%)	3.18	0.72	Accepted
6.	I try to manage my time effectively to avoid unnecessary stress	99 (82.5%)	21 (17.5%)	3.18	0.71	Accepted
7.	I seek help from counsellors or mentors when I feel overwhelmed	84 (70.0%)	36 (30.0%)	2.92	0.79	Accepted

Cluster Mean: 3.14 = Agreed

Benchmark Mean = 2.50 (Decision Rule: 2.50 and above = Agreed; below 2.50 = Disagreed)

Interpretation of Findings

From Table 3 above, the cluster mean of 3.14 indicates that respondents agreed that the listed strategies are commonly employed to manage stress. The highest-rated coping strategy was engaging in prayers or religious activities (Mean = 3.28), followed by taking short breaks or rest (Mean = 3.24) and talking to friends or family members (Mean = 3.21).

These findings suggest that students rely heavily on social support, rest, and religious coping mechanisms to deal with stress. Other common strategies included listening to music or watching movies (Mean = 3.18) and effective time management (Mean = 3.18).

The least-rated coping method was seeking help from counselors or mentors (Mean = 2.92), which, although above the benchmark, shows that professional counseling is less frequently used by students compared to personal or informal coping methods.

In summary, the findings demonstrate that final year students at the university of Benin adopt a mix of emotional, social and spiritual coping strategies such as; talking to friends and loved ones, taking breaks, watching a movie or listening to music, time management, sporting activities and occasionally seeking counseling to manage stress effectively.

Research Question 4:

What are the mental health outcomes associated with stress among final-year students?

To address this question, respondents were asked to indicate their level of agreement with statements related to the effects of stress on their mental health and emotional well-being.

The responses are presented in Table 4 below.

Table 4: Respondents' Opinions on Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Stress

S/N	Items	Agreed	Disagreed	Mean	Standard Deviation	Decision
1.	I often feel anxious or nervous due to academic pressure	100 (83.3%)	20 (16.7%)	3.22	0.70	Accepted
2.	I experience headaches, fatigues, or insomnia	102 (85.0%)	18 (15.0%)	3.26	0.67	Accepted

	when stressed					
3.	Stress sometimes makes me lose interest in activities I enjoy.	95 (79.2%)	25 (20.8%)	3.10	0.75	Accepted
4.	Stress has made me feel isolated from friends or classmates.	88 (73.3%)	32 (26.7%)	2.99	0.80	Accepted
5.	I sometimes feel hopeless or emotionally drained because of stress.	96 (80.0%)	24 (20.0%)	3.13	0.73	Accepted

Cluster Mean: 3.14 = Agreed

Benchmark Mean = 2.50 (Decision Rule: 2.50 and above = Agreed; below 2.50 = Disagreed)

Interpretation of Findings

From Table 4 above, the overall cluster mean of 3.14 indicates that the respondents agreed that stress has significant mental health outcomes among final-year students at the University of Benin.

The highest mean score was recorded for experiencing headaches, fatigue, or insomnia (Mean = 3.26), followed by feeling anxious or nervous due to academic pressure (Mean = 3.22). These findings suggest that stress leads to both psychological and physical symptoms, such as anxiety, restlessness, and exhaustion.

Additionally, respondents agreed that stress can lead to loss of interest in enjoyable activities (Mean = 3.10), feelings of isolation (Mean = 2.99), and emotional exhaustion or hopelessness (Mean = 3.13).

Overall, the findings indicate that stress among final year students at the university of Benin is associated with negative mental health outcomes such as anxiety, fatigue, insomnia, loss of interest, emotional exhaustion, and social withdrawals. These outcomes reflect how prolonged academic stress can lead to serious psychological strain and decreased overall well-being among students.

Discussion of Findings

This section presents a discussion of the major findings of the study in relation to existing literature and theoretical perspectives. The purpose is to interpret the results and show how they align with or differ from previous research on stress among university students.

The findings revealed that final-year students at the University of Benin experience stress primarily due to heavy academic workload, project defense preparation, financial difficulties, and uncertainty about future career prospects. Other significant sources of stress included balancing academic and personal responsibilities, lack of rest, and relationship issues.

This result supports the view of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) in their Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, which states that stress arises when an individual perceives that the demands of a situation exceed their available coping resources. Similarly, Amadi, Eche, and Ekanem (2017) found in a study of Nigerian universities that academic pressure and financial strain were predominant stressors, significantly impacting students' quality of life.

These findings suggest that final-year students face a unique combination of academic and emotional challenges, especially as they transition toward graduation and employment.

The study also showed that most respondents agreed that high levels of stress negatively affect their concentration, motivation, and overall mental well-being. Students reported symptoms such as anxiety, mood swings, depression, and difficulty in thinking clearly.

This finding aligns with Anyanwu and Ikwuka (2017) who found that academic stress significantly correlates with poor mental health and lower academic performance among undergraduates in Nigeria. The results also support Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, as prolonged stress can hinder students from fulfilling higher psychological and self-actualization needs due to emotional exhaustion and mental fatigue.

In essence, stress not only impacts students' academic performance but also their emotional balance, leading to decreased motivation and potential mental health disorders if left unaddressed.

The study revealed that students adopt various coping strategies such as talking to friends and family, taking short breaks, engaging in religious activities, listening to music, and practicing time management. However, seeking help from counselors or mentors was among the least utilized coping methods.

This is consistent with Otu and Oluwasina (2020) who observed that Nigerian university students frequently rely on emotion-focused coping strategies like social support and spirituality, while underutilizing formal professional counseling services. Within the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, these responses fall under emotion-focused coping, where individuals attempt to manage emotional distress rather than directly change the stressor.

The results imply that while students make efforts to manage stress, there is still a gap in the use of institutional or professional mental health support systems.

The findings further revealed that stress among final-year students results in anxiety, fatigue, loss of interest in activities, feelings of isolation, and emotional exhaustion. This is in line with the work of Akinade (2019) who found that chronic academic stress leads to psychological symptoms such as depression, restlessness, and insomnia among university students in South-West Nigeria.

These mental health outcomes indicate that stress not only affects students' immediate academic performance but also poses long-term risks to their psychological stability. It underscores the need for universities to implement proactive mental health interventions and awareness programs, a point also emphasized by Oyibo and Ogunwale (2021) in their study on mental health advocacy in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Overall, the discussion reveals that final-year students at the University of Benin face multiple stressors that impact their academic performance and mental health. Although they adopt coping strategies such as social support and spirituality, reliance on professional mental health services remains low. The findings align with existing literature and the theoretical frameworks guiding this study, emphasizing the importance of stress management, psychological support, and institutional intervention for improved student well-being.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION, AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the Study

This study focused on the topic “Perceived impact of stress on the mental health of Final-Year Students at the University of Benin.” The study investigated the various sources of stress experienced by students in their final year, the relationship between stress and mental health, the coping strategies adopted to manage stress, and the mental health outcomes associated with such stress.

A descriptive survey design was adopted for the study. The population comprised all final-year students of the University of Benin, while a sample of 120 respondents was drawn from six faculties twenty (20) respondents from each faculty. The instrument for data collection was a structured questionnaire. Data were analyzed using frequency counts, percentages, mean scores, and cluster means to answer the research questions.

The findings of the study are summarized as follows:

The study revealed that the major sources of stress among final-year students include heavy academic workload, pressure from project defense, financial difficulties, uncertainty about future employment, lack of rest and sleep, and balancing academic with family or personal responsibilities. These stressors are consistent with the transitional challenges faced by students nearing graduation.

Findings showed that high levels of stress significantly affect students’ mental health, often resulting in mood swings, anxiety, depression, poor concentration, and reduced academic performance. The data suggest that stress does not only affect academic productivity but also the overall psychological well-being of students.

The study also found that students commonly employ personal and social coping mechanisms such as talking to friends and family, taking breaks, engaging in prayers or religious activities, listening to music, and practicing time management. However, it was observed that professional coping methods, such as seeking help from counselors or psychologists, were less frequently used.

Furthermore, the study indicated that stress leads to adverse mental health outcomes, including anxiety, insomnia, fatigue, emotional exhaustion, isolation from peers, and feelings of hopelessness. These symptoms reflect both psychological and physiological manifestations of prolonged academic stress.

Overall, the findings revealed that while final-year students make conscious efforts to cope with stress, the burden of academic, financial, and emotional challenges still significantly affects their mental health.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that stress is an inevitable but manageable aspect of final-year students' academic life at the University of Benin. The academic environment, coupled with financial pressure, career uncertainty, and personal responsibilities, contributes significantly to stress levels among students.

The study also concludes that stress has a dual impact it affects not only academic performance but also mental and emotional health. Prolonged exposure to stress without adequate coping mechanisms can result in anxiety, depression, fatigue, and reduced motivation to learn.

Despite these challenges, students demonstrate resilience through social and spiritual coping strategies, showing that interpersonal relationships and religious engagement play important

roles in emotional stability. However, the underutilization of counseling services highlights the need for greater institutional support and awareness about mental health resources.

In line with the Transactional Model of Stress and Coping (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984), students' responses to stress depend largely on their appraisal of the situation and the resources available to cope with it. Likewise, Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs suggests that stress can hinder students from achieving higher levels of self-actualization when basic and psychological needs are not adequately met.

Therefore, the university has a crucial role to play in creating an environment that promotes psychological well-being, encourages healthy coping practices, and minimizes stress-inducing factors.

Recommendations

From the results and conclusions of this study, the following recommendations are made:

The University of Benin should expand and publicize its counseling and mental health units. Qualified counselors and psychologists should be available to offer professional guidance to students dealing with stress, anxiety, or depression. Regular awareness campaigns can help reduce the stigma associated with seeking psychological help.

The University should also collaborate with health professionals to organize periodic seminars and workshops on stress management, time management, and emotional intelligence. Such programs will equip students with practical tools to handle academic pressure effectively.

Faculties should develop peer mentoring programs where senior students and alumni can guide final-year students through the challenges of project work, exams, and transition to

post-graduation life. Support groups and social clubs can also provide emotional relief and a sense of belonging.

Physical activities such as sports, exercise, and campus recreational programs should be encouraged. These activities help to reduce stress hormones, improve mood, and promote mental alertness. The University should ensure that sports facilities and recreation centers are adequately equipped and accessible to all students.

Since financial strain was identified as a major source of stress, the University should increase access to financial aid, bursaries, or flexible part-time work opportunities. External organizations and alumni networks should also be encouraged to sponsor scholarship schemes for deserving students.

Introducing a general studies (GST) course or orientation session on mental health will help students understand stress, identify early warning signs, and adopt healthy coping strategies. This will promote a culture of openness and early intervention.

Departmental boards should assess academic timetables, project submission deadlines, and examination schedules to ensure students are not overloaded, especially during their final year. Flexible deadlines and coordinated timetabling can help reduce avoidable academic pressure.

Lecturers should create a more approachable and understanding atmosphere that allows students to express their academic or personal difficulties without fear of bias or ridicule. Supportive mentorship improves motivation and reduces academic anxiety.

Suggestions for Further Study

To build on the findings of this study, future research could focus on the following areas:

- A comparative study of stress levels among male and female students across different faculties in the University of Benin.
- An investigation into the effectiveness of specific coping strategies (such as counseling, exercise, or spirituality) in reducing academic stress.
- A study on the impact of institutional support systems such as counseling units, student welfare, and mentorship programs on students' stress management.
- A longitudinal study tracking how stress levels change from first year to final year, to understand the progression and contributing factors of stress in higher education.

Contribution to Knowledge

This study contributes to existing knowledge by highlighting the specific stressors affecting final-year students at the University of Benin and identifying coping patterns that are culturally and contextually relevant. It emphasizes the link between academic pressure and mental health outcomes while underlining the importance of institutional support, thereby providing a framework for future policy formulation and student welfare initiatives.

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APPENDIX

DEPARTMENT OF HEALTH, SAFETY AND ENVIRONMENTAL EDUCATION

QUESTIONNAIRE FOR RESPONDENTS

Dear Respondent,

I am a final-year student of the University of Benin conducting a research study titled “Perceived Impact of Stress On The Mental Health Of Final Year Students in the University of Benin.” This questionnaire is designed to gather information on the sources, effects, and coping mechanisms of stress among final-year students.

Please, kindly respond to the questions as honestly as possible. Your responses will be treated with utmost confidentiality and used strictly for academic purposes.

Thank you for your cooperation.

Instruction:

Kindly tick (☑) the option that best describes your opinion.

SA – Strongly Agree; A – Agree; D – Disagree; SD – Strongly Disagree.

Section A: Demographic Data

1. Gender: Male Female
2. Age: 18–21 years 22–25 years 26 years and above
3. Faculty: Medicine Education Social Sciences Law Pharmacy Life Sciences
4. Marital Status: Single Married

Section B: Sources of Stress Among Final-Year Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
1	Heavy academic workload causes stress.				
2	Preparing for project defense gives pressure and anxiety.				
3	Financial difficulties contribute to stress level.				
4	Uncertainty about future career or employment causes stress.				
5	Balancing academics with personal or family responsibilities is stressful.				
6	Relationship problems increase stress.				
7	Lack of adequate rest and sleep adds to stress.				

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Section C: Perception of the Relationship Between Stress and Mental Health

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
8	High levels of stress affects concentration and academic performance.				
9	When I am stressed, I experience mood swings or irritability.				
10	Stress makes me feel anxious or depressed.				
11	Prolonged stress affects the ability to think clearly.				
12	I believe stress has a negative effect on my overall mental health.				
13	Stress affects motivation to study or attend lectures.				

Section D: Coping Strategies Used by Final-Year Students

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
14	I talk to friends or family members when I feel stressed.				
15	I take short breaks or rest when I am overwhelmed.				
16	I engage in prayer or religious activities to relieve stress.				
17	I participate in sports or physical exercise to manage stress.				
18	I listen to music or watch movies to relax.				
19	I try to manage my time effectively to avoid unnecessary stress.				
20	I seek help from counselors or mentors when I feel overwhelmed.				

Section E: Mental Health Outcomes Associated with Stress

S/N	Items	SA	A	D	SD
21	I often feel anxious or nervous due to academic pressure.				
22	I experience headaches, fatigue, or insomnia when stressed.				
23	Stress sometimes makes me lose interest in activities I enjoy.				
24	Stress has made me feel isolated from friends or classmates.				
25	I sometimes feel hopeless or emotionally drained because of stress.				

End of Questionnaire

Thank you for your time and honest responses.