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INAUGURAL LECTURE
SERIES

004

Management of Psychological Stress
by

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1.0 Introduction

The Vice-Chancellor, Sir, Deputy Vice-Chancellor, Registrar and other Principal Officers, Provost, College of Education, Provost, College of

Human Resource Development and Lifelong Learning, Provost of other Colleges, Deans and Directors, Members of Senate, Gentlemen of the Press, My Colleagues in Academics, Our Distinguished Guests, Ladies and Gentlemen, on this occasion of the fourth in the series of the inaugural lectures of Osun State University, I stand before you to x-ray psychological stress-a very topical subject which is constantly written about, researched and speculated on.

People use the term stress in a number of different ways: Our lives are filled with pressures and problems. We feel their impact at home, at school and on the job and say we are stressed out. Sometimes people use the term to describe particular sorts of events or environmental conditions. For example, fans might speculate that a professional football coach's heart attack was caused by the pressures of his profession. Other examples might include receiving a failing grade on HRM 312: Industrial Psychology examination or arriving noticeably late to an important meeting, or playing a sudden-death overtime in hockey. We would acknowledge, for example, that walking in late to a meeting could be very embarrassing (i.e. stressful). Getting late for appointments creates stress in those who value punctuality.

Likewise for working at the service counter of a major department store like BOOREPO Chemist on the day after Christmas; it's a stressful job. In each of these instances, stress refers to characteristics of the environment. But people also use the term in a quite different way. Sometimes it refers to the effects of those environments. The phrase "I'm feeling a lot of stress" might refer to

various symptoms a person is experiencing, such as muscular tension or difficulty concentrating.

Individuals are similar, but they are also unique: The most important element in all of Education is the element of individual differences. Law of individual differences is the fact that people differ in personality, abilities, values and needs. Individual age groups would enter the education system and participate in its different cycles (UNESCO, 2006). Individual differences among people are the reason for variation in cognitive styles and functioning. One long-noted difference among people which has gained currency is that of conceptual style. People gather and evaluate information from their environments in different ways. This difference has been found to affect their performance in school. Some are fast learners, some are slow learners, some are divergent in thinking while others are convergent. There are extroverts and introverts. This implies that teachers should individualise instruction in order to meet the needs of each student. Individuals with high tolerance for stress may handle ambiguous and unstructured tasks more easily than people with low tolerance for stress.

There are individuals with a strong achievement orientation, while others with a relatively low need to achieve generally prefer easier tasks. Such differences in achievement orientation find expression in the levels of effort people exert to accomplish assignments, objectives, or goals. What is intrinsically motivating for one person may not be for someone else. Hobbies, for example, are almost by definition intrinsically motivating, yet they also reflect the diversity of

human taste for different activities. Stamp collecting may be intrinsically motivating to one person, yet exceedingly boring to many others.

Hemispheric lateralisation is the relatively greater localisation of a function in one cerebral hemisphere. It is a condition in which right or left side of the brain has great influence over the body than the other side. It produces right-handedness in most people who have dominant left cerebral hemisphere, while it produces left-handedness in most people who have dominant right cerebral hemisphere. Left-handedness is as old as the Biblical times: 'Again the Israelites cried out to the Lord, and he gave them a deliverer – Ehud, a left-handed man, the son of Gera the Benjamite ... Ehud reached with his left hand, drew the sword from his right thigh and plunged it into the king's belly ...' (Judges 3:5, 21). Ehud rose to become the second Judge in Israel. In modern times, there are left-handers: Former United States President, Bill Clinton, former South African President, Nelson Mandela, alQueida Strongman, Osama bin Ladin, Nigeria's Vice-President, Namadi Sambo, Lagos State Governor, Babatunde Fasola (SAN), United States President, Barrack Obama are left-handers. Almost 10 percent of British men are left handed. So are 67 students (48 males, 19 females) in Osun State University. So is Alhassan.

Some leaders have a track record of getting good results across a variety of situations whereas others seem to have difficulties getting work done through others. Some leaders do a good job making decisions, providing direction, creating plans, giving regular

feedback, and getting their followers the resources they need to be cohesive teams. Other leaders have difficulties making decisions, set vague or unclear goals, and subsequently cannot achieve organisationals' objectives.

There is a long-hypothesised notion of a meaningful link between stress and learning (Janis, 2000). The learning events and developmental experiences that punctuate one's life are usually, perhaps always, stressful (Grey and Gordon, 2001).

Experiencing stress everyday is a normal routine. What is not routine is stress that is so intense that it becomes unhealthy, dysfunctional, and dangerous.

Some of the issues we shall address in this lecture are stressors, stress symptoms, forms of psychological stress, hassles, stress in the home, job stress, stress in school, the essence of stress, stress and creative incubation, understanding the effects of stress, and management of psychological stress.

Before we proceed further, therefore, it will be useful to agree upon some conventions of the concept.

2.0 Conceptual Clarification

Hans Selye was one of the founding fathers of stress research. His view in (1994 :7) was that 'stress is not necessarily something bad' ____ it all depends on how you take it. The stress of exhilarating, creative successful work is beneficial, while that of failure, humiliation or infection is detrimental. Selye believed that the biochemical effects

of stress would be experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative. Since then, a great deal of further research has been conducted, and ideas have moved on. Stress is now viewed as a “bad thing”, with a range of harmful biochemical and long-term effects. These effects have been observed in positive situations.

Stress is defined by a set of circumstances under which an individual cannot respond adequately or instrumentally to environmental stimuli, or can so respond only at the cost of excessive wear and tear on the organism for example, chronic fatigue, tension, worry, physical damage, nervous breakdown, or loss of self-esteem. Stress is therefore a relational concept, since it involves factors in the environment combined with factors in the individual. Stress is a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize. Stress often occurs in situations that are overly complex, demanding, or unclear. As has been argued elsewhere, some environments are stressful for all or most persons, and some persons are highly susceptible to stress in almost any environment, but between these extremes, it is the particular match-up between certain individual traits that produces stress (Alhassan, 2000:211).

During the course of our life, we encounter stress, some in high levels, some in low. When we compare the image of ourselves to the reality of ourselves, opposing forces are created, and our mind tries to match the created image with the current situation.

Stress can be made worse by other people’s expectations, and being human we always care what others think of us even though we tell

ourselves we do not. We try to change ourselves so that we can be accepted by other people, regardless of whether or not they care. Negative thoughts about our self image also add to the stress. We remember everything that we have done in life, but more so the negative moments over and over again in our minds, lowering our self esteem.

The first thing we have to learn is that what happened in the past cannot be changed, or erased. All we can do is to take the lesson we learnt, and learn not to do it again. What happens in the past is exactly that, passed, and we must learn to live for now.

2.1 Stressors are those specific characteristics in individuals, tasks, organisations, or the environment that pose some degree of threat or challenge to people. Specifically, it is the pressure and strain that result from demands or challenges that require some kind of readjustment by the individual. For example, conflict, frustration, deprivation, political tension and anxiety can all produce stress. So can a change in jobs (including a promotion), an increase in workload, a marriage, a divorce, a birth in the family or a death. Whatever the source of stress, the general approach to it has been to see it in a negative light, as something that always must be either reduced or avoided altogether. From the examples cited, it is obvious that stress is not necessarily a bad thing. In fact, if we always avoid it, we would never establish intimate relationships, have children, try new things, or succeed at work. This view found expression in Kobasa Hilker and Maddi, (2001) who argues that stress simply cannot be completely avoided.

2.2 Forms of Psychological Stress

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, Psychologists have found it useful to distinguish among different kinds of stress. The most preferred classification considers stress as frustration, anxiety, or conflict.

The term frustration applies to any obstruction between instrumental behaviour and its goal or to any interference with or disruption of foregoing instrumental behaviour. Specific types of frustration include the following:

- *Non-reinforcement after a history of reinforcement.* For example, a student who has been consistently rewarded for studying in a certain way (such as memorising) suddenly finds himself in a course where such behaviour is no longer rewarded by good marks.
- *A delay in reinforcement.* An advertising writer accustomed to receiving quick feedback about his work finds that he now has to wait days or weeks before hearing anything.
- *Sheer failure.* A salesperson does all the right things, all the things he/she is used to doing, but experiences a long string of unsuccessful calls.
- *Conflict between two or more strong but incompatible responses.* Role conflict is thus a special case of frustration. So is a period of indecision when some decision has to be made quickly.

Anxiety refers to the sense of dread, foreboding, and apprehension that gnaws at people’s insides and darkens their outlook on things in general. What are the causes of anxiety within the school system? There are many, but this lecture shall focus on students and anxiety – generating situations:

Consider preparing for an examination. As you walked to the examination room, your breath was short, your hands felt clammy and cold, and your heart began pounding against your chest. You began to feel anxious and panicky. Now, waiting for the examination to begin, you try to focus on the subjects you have studied. But all that comes to mind are thoughts of failing the examination, and ruining your life. The invigilator hands out the examination, and if this example is even somewhat familiar to you, you already have an intuitive understanding of stress. Anxiety is usually experienced in anticipation of a stressful encounter. Waiting to give a talk, addressing a political rally or engage in athletic competition are all examples of anxiety-provoking situations. In contrast, depression usually occurs after stressful changes in our lives. Breaking up a relationship, death in the family, or severe illness are examples of depression provoking situations.

3.0 Stress Symptoms

Let us now identify some stress symptoms.

Table I: Stress Symptoms 1

Are you behaving 'unlike' yourself?

Has your mood become negative, hostile or depressed?

Do you have difficulty sleeping?

Are you defensive or touchy?

Are your relationships suffering?

Have you made more mistakes or bad decisions lately?

Have you lost interest in normally enjoyable activities?

Are you using alcohol or other drugs?

Do you seem to have little energy?

Do you worry a lot?

Are you nervous much of the time?

Have you been under-reacting or overreacting?

Have you had an increase in headaches or back pains?

Source: Alhassan, 1991

Although all the factors highlighted in Table I probably have an adverse impact on people, the degree of stress associated with each of them depends on one's overall level of stress tolerance and

previous experience with the stressor in question (Alhassan,1991). Similarly, it is important to realise that stress is in the eye of the beholder – what one person may see as challenging and potentially rewarding, another may see as threatening and distressful (Mccauley, 1987 and Staw 1984).

Let us consider the following symptoms to see if stress is taking its toll on you or on your colleagues and subordinates.

Table II: Stress Symptoms 2

How you feel (psychological symptoms)	Feeling anxious and tense, aggressive, apathetic, bored, tired, depressed, restless, impatient, frustrated, guilty, irritable, sense of inferiority, nervous and lacking interest in social activities.
How you think	Difficulty in making decisions, less creative in solving problems, forgetful, hypersensitive to criticism, poor concentration, poor organisation of work and tasks, blame yourself for everything
What happens to your health	Asthma, tension headaches, muscular stiffness and aches, coronary heart disease, diarrhea, faintness and dizziness, dyspepsia, frequent urinating, fatigue, migraines, neuroses, nightmares, insomnia, psychoses, skin rash, ulcers, loss of sexual interest, sweating without exercising.
How you behave	Have accidents, emotional immaturity, eat too much or too little, drink and smoke excessively, incoherent speech, impulsive behaviour, general disorientation, nervous laughter, restless, trembling, passive indolence.
What happens to your body (physiological symptoms)	Pounding of the heart, high blood pressure, dryness of throat and mouth, excessive perspiration, pupil dilation, hot and cold spells, numbness, butterflies in the stomach, large muscle groups tense.
How stress affects your work	Increased absenteeism, poorer communication and interpersonal relations, less commitment, higher accident rate, more antagonism, less creativity, less concern for colleagues, less job satisfaction, poorer productivity.

Source: Adapted from Gericke, (1997:20)

It is important to remember that all of us at some time or another experience some of these symptoms, so do not diagnose stress in yourself or other people as soon as you experience one or two of the symptoms from time to time. However, an occasional check of these stress symptoms can alert you to potential problems that may require attention.

3.1 Hassles

Have you ever had one of those days that begins with the mysteriously missing shower soap and lost car keys, continues with the traffic snarls that make you late for work, and ends with an empty refrigerator and a loud, all-night party next door? These are hassles – frustrating everyday situations and events that interfere with the ability to function efficiently or to attain goals.

Studies show that daily hassles contribute a significant amount to our overall stress load. Chronic headache sufferers, for example, report more frequent hassles than do control subjects (Lau, 1996). Higher levels of daily hassles in college freshmen are predictive of both depression and physical symptoms (Lu, 1994). And more frequent computer hassles – lost files, crashed disks, missing data, corrupted flash drives, and the like – are associated with muscle pain and headaches (Lau, 1996). Fortunately, hassles are sometimes offset by

uplifting thoughts and events such as relating well with spouse or lover, relating well with friends, completing a task, feeling healthy, getting enough sleep, meeting responsibilities, and so on.

3.2 Stress in the Home

Home is not always the castle it is often touted to be. Indeed, home life can be a major source of stress (Dumas, 1993). Such aspects of the home environment as the physical and social structure of the neighbourhood, financial problems, parent-child relationships, madam-housemaid relationships, master-guard/driver relationships, interactions with roommates, family, and landlords are potential stressors.

The two most stressful situations in a marriage are those in which one or both spouses insist on having their own way and when one or both spend money unwisely. The third stressful situation occurs when there is an imbalance in the extent to which each partner finds it necessary to give in to the wishes of the other. Finally, home life is seen as more stressful when either marital partner feels he/she cannot readily talk to the other about things that are of personal importance (Holly et. al; 1982).

3.3 Occupational Stress

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, as humans, more of our time is spent working compared to any other awake activity. Occupational stress is a result of a factor or a combination of factors at work. It impacts the workers, disrupting their psychological or physical well-being. It can be caused by a number of factors including work overload. Work overload results from the burden of excess work. Stress heightens when several interruptions begin to slow down one's progress at work. The situation becomes more complicated when there is a

conflict among co-workers or superior that provides less motivation for excelling at the job. Indeed, these stress sources could come from an internal or external force. It may also be caused by the ambiguity of the task required of the worker. Stimulus underload happens when there are not enough tasks for the worker to undertake. It can cause job dissatisfaction, post traumatic stress syndrome, and increase the level of cholesterol and the heart rate. Jobs can be sources of psychological stress and even mental and psychological impairment. On a more positive note, jobs can provide income, meaningful life experiences, and self esteem, regulation of our lives and respect from and association with others. Thus, the wellbeing of organisations and people relates to how well management design jobs.

Stress levels vary considerably from one occupation to another. Studies show substantial stress in teachers (Fontana, 1993; Alhassan, 1992a), orchestra conductors (Fetter, 1993), and construction workers (Lu, 1994). Since stress contributes to disease and death, the job you choose may influence not only the way you live but the way you die.

The greatest part of one's emotional life is lived in his job. One may be highly competent with special ability sets for a given career, but once such a career fails to offer emotional outlet peculiar to one's need and aspirations, unhappiness, and discontentment and poorer productivity follow (Williams, 2004; Alhassan, 2009a).

The body is the armature of the self. The Psychological self is constructed around the armature of the physical self. Recognition of the boundaries of both will lead to more effective functioning (Alhassan, 1998).

3.4 Stress in School

Within the school system, four major sources of stress can be recognised:

- *Pupil misbehaviour:* noisy pupils, difficult classes, difficult behaviour problems such as lack of interest, inattention, hostility, lack of cooperation, arrogance, carelessness, autism, impoliteness, temper, tantrum, withdrawal, self-failure, restlessness, lying, talking out of turn, stealing, cheating at examinations, vandalism, fighting, sleeping in the classroom, hindering other children(hoc), quarrelsomeness.

It is relevant to differentiate these types of misbehaviour from routine deviance: routine deviance refers to the type of mischief or petty misdemeanour which is accepted as being part of the normal behaviour of children. Talking too loudly, 'having a laugh' and working slowly are examples. Such activities are normally expected by teachers and are not normally intended by children as a threat. They are thus within the bounds of the working consensus. Working consensus is based on recognition of the legitimate interests of other people and on a mutual exchange of dignity between the teacher, support staff and the children in the class. Embedded in this is a tacit recognition of the coping needs of the other and a shared understanding that the 'self of the other will not be unduly threatened in the classroom.

- *Poor working conditions:* poor career structure, poor promotion.
opportunities, inadequate salary, shortage of equipment.
- *Time pressures:* not enough time to do the work and too much work to do.
- *Poor school ethos:* inadequate disciplinary policy at school, lack of consensus on minimum standards.

The behaviour of disruptive pupils is a source of stress. The following elements of disruptive behaviour have been manifested by primary and secondary school pupils across the country at different times: rowdiness, threats of violence, actual violence, damage to property, theft and sexual misbehaviour.

The incidence of rowdiness characterised by deliberate lateness to lessons, disturbance in the lessons, verbal abuse and refusal to cooperate is on the increase in recent times, most likely reflecting the increasing wave of indiscipline in the larger society. The expression of pupil anger can be a disturbing and frightening experience for teachers whose personal values and previous experience have led them to believe that the right way to deal with angry feelings is to control them tightly and to hide them from other people.

Teaching is the purposeful direction and management of the learning process. Teaching is not giving knowledge or skills to students; teaching is the process of providing opportunities for students to produce relatively permanent change through the engagement in

experiences provided by the teacher. Teaching is a demanding job. It involves the use of the teacher's intellect and experience; planning of the lesson, sourcing for and gathering of teaching materials, rehearsing on the lesson plan, developing techniques and skills, and choosing the methodology or combining different methodologies in lesson delivery; managing the class while delivering the lesson ensuring a high level of discipline, evaluation of the lesson, testing and examining the children and conducting critical evaluation of the whole teaching-learning process. Overlapping is a term coined by Kounin (1970) to describe the skill of being able to do more than one thing at the same time. Most teachers work under such pressure that they have to think about and do more than one thing at a time. Decisions have to be made very rapidly.

The modern teacher in Nigeria thus has the benefit of many studies carried out, for example, by staff and students of the Faculties and Institutes of Education of Nigerian Universities. By utilising these studies, the teacher also becomes conscious of the need to conduct studies which should improve classroom practice.

4.0 The Essence of Stress

Stress is, indeed, a fact of life, beginning at the moment of our entry into this world and recurring until we leave it. Thus, stress is inevitable within the school system or any organisation for that matter. Any conscientious lecturer in any of Nigerian higher institutions, particularly the public ones, can hardly escape being under stress most of the times. In the first instance, working in Nigeria means that he will be vulnerable to socio-political and

economic stress. Teachers are not provided with an enabling environment to do their work efficiently and effectively. Nor is this all, most departments in the universities are under-staffed and the teacher/student ratio is high. Amongst those employed, some do not have offices. The workload is too much on the teachers especially, lecturers.

The lecturer is constantly battling with overcrowding in the lecture room. Marking students scripts is likely to be stressful. Apart from working tirelessly under the obligation of publish or perish, lecturers also function as Academic advisers and facilitators, as members of entrepreneurship and such other committees set up by the universities to help students see oasis, lights at the ends of dark tunnels and overcome crossroads where they exist. Seeing the university environment as the melting pot for young adults of different backgrounds, lecturers have demonstrated sustainable interest in making their students worthy in character and in learning. Even administering and invigilating examinations may be stressful as it may be a real war trying to stop many of the students from cheating. Teachers and lecturers are stress-ridden.

Administrators cannot completely eliminate stress either for others or for themselves. Furthermore, a certain degree of stress seems to be a precondition for psychological growth, achievement, and the development of new skills; although stress always involves at least some temporary degree of discomfort, it is frequently the occasion for the emergence of creative solutions to personal or organisational problems.

It is to be noted that stress can either facilitate or inhibit performance, depending on the situation. Too much stress can take a toll on individuals and organisations – such a toll includes decreased health and emotional wellbeing, reduced job performance, and decreased organisational effectiveness.

Effectiveness has to be emphasised because the person who is consistently effective, and so fulfils his needs, will be happy as well. Good adjustment calls for emotional balance. It is an outlook on life that keeps the person effective within the limits of his/her resources and on good terms with himself/herself. The ideal is not a person so contented with what he/she is that he/she never wants to improve. The three cores of good adjustment are realism, contentment, and self-acceptance (Alhassan, 2009b).

4.1 Stress and Creative Incubation

A certain degree of stress is necessary to solve an intellectual problem. When he encounters an unexpected check, the able scientist neither shrugs it off nor broods over it. He reinterprets if he can. If he does not arrive at a reinterpretation that makes sense, he will carry the problem with him (Zeigarnik, 1927). This residual stress 'incubation' keeps the problem 'in the back of his mind'. Suddenly, seemingly out of nowhere, the solution pops into his mind (Humphrey, 1948).

This experience is reported by numerous discoverers, as in the story of Kekule, who was fruitlessly trying to explain the chemical mystery of benzene. Benzene has six carbon atoms and six hydrogen atoms, even though the normal combining rate is four to one. Kekule could

no more explain this than his predecessors could, but he kept the problem in mind.

One evening while he was dozing by the fire there flashed into his mind an image of the atoms dancing in the air before him in a hexagonal ring. This hexagon, a completely new concept in chemistry, accounted for the facts about benzene. The solution had in some way grown by itself in Kekule's mind. Incubation is a stage in the creative process. In addition, one crucial element is the person's stress or his involvement with the problem. Kekule was sufficiently committed to the problem to build up stress, keep the problem alive, and eventually solve it.

The ability to live with a problem, tolerating some stress instead of settling for an inadequate solution or giving up, is essential for original, creative thought. These remarks are based on Stein's (1961: 19) observation of creative chemist:

We speak often of 'attacking' a problem, and that is precisely what most of us do. But highly creative men are not so likely to try to force or pull out a solution; they tend to become part of the problem field, sensing its forces and following its leads, and thus to let the problem 'solve itself'. Less creative workers seem more oriented toward quick achievement. The more creative work come slowly at first, marshalling

resources. Then they move quickly, with an air of certainty, to a synthesis.

Short-term assignments in school do nothing to encourage a patient, exploratory attitude, which permits one to waste time in blind alleys. The teacher presses the student to lay out a schedule, to work forward according to a plan, and to set a terminal date for his work. This type of guidance has obvious merits, and indeed it is essential in much teaching. But provision should also be made for long-lasting involvement in a problem while more routine work continues.

5.0 Understanding the Effects of Stress

Mr. Vice-Chancellor, In order to understand the effects of stress, an analogy might be helpful. Kites need an optimal amount of wind to fly; they will not fly on windless days, and the string may break on a day that is too windy. You can think of stress as like the wind for a kite: There is a certain level that is optimal, neither too little nor too much. Another analogy is your car. Just as an automobile engine operates optimally within a certain range of revolutions per minute (RPM), most people function best at certain levels of stress. It is to be noted that a certain amount of stress or arousal is helpful in increasing motivation and performance, but too much stress can be counterproductive. For example, it is common and probably helpful to feel a little anxiety before giving a speech, but being too nervous can destroy one's effectiveness just as being too nervous can affect a student's performance in an examination.

The optimal level of stress depends on a number of factors. One is

the level of physical activity actually demanded by the task. Another is the perceived difficulty of the task. Performance often suffers when difficult tasks are performed under stressful situations. For example, let us think of how one's performance might differ when learning to first drive a car with an instructor who is quiet and reserved rather than one who yells a lot. Chances are performance will be much better with the first instructor than with the second.

It is important to note that task difficulty is generally a function of experience; the more experience one has with a task, the less difficult it becomes. Moreover, not only do people cope with stress more readily when performing easier tasks, people often need higher levels of stress for performing them optimally.

One underlying purpose behind any type of practice, be it football, or drama, is to reduce task difficulty and help members or players to perform at an even higher level when faced with the stress of key performances and games.

Although, stress can have positive effects, research has focused on the negative implications of too much stress on health and work. In terms of health, stress has been linked to heart disease (Friedman & Illmer, 1984), immune system deficiencies (Pomerlean & Rodin, 1986) and the growth rates of tumours (Justice, 1985).

In terms of work behaviours, various studies have reported that work-related stress has caused a dramatic increase in drug and alcohol use

in the work place (Latack, 1986; Quayle, 1983) and that stress was positively related to absenteeism, intentions to quit, and turnover (Jamal, 1984).

Stress can also affect the decision-making process. Although leaders need to act decisively in stressful situations (i.e., crises), they may not make good decisions under stress (Fiedler, 1992 & Mulder, 1986).

Some have suggested that people make poor decisions when under stress because they revert to their intuition rather than think rationally about problems (Weschler, 1955). Prolonged stress can be harmful to employees and their institutions: For employees, it could find expression in their health, mental alertness, emotional stability, work performance or interpersonal relationships.

For organisations, the toll includes decreased productivity and increased employee absenteeism, turnover, and medical costs. It stands to reason, then, that leaders in any activity should know something about stress. Leaders should understand the nature of stress because the leadership role itself can be stressful and because leaders' stress can impair the performance and wellbeing of followers.

Following a special audit that revealed alarming signs of stress, weak corporate governance and excessive non-performing loans, the Central Bank of NIGERIA (CBN) sacked the management of eight banks, installed new Managers and set law enforcement agencies on the sacked Managers. It is to be noted that there have been painful

backlashes from the reform since November, 2009, over 12,000 bank workers have been sacked and thousands more are set to go as banks declare losses and strive for learner costs: These are part of the new Managements' in-house restructuring.

Burnout is a psychological syndrome with three components, emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal achievements. When stress is prolonged, it can lead to burnout, which is marked by a gradual increase in psychological, behavioural, and physical symptoms until the person can no longer function effectively. Burnout can occur in home life and other settings but is most often observed in job environments.

Contributions to the Understanding of Management of Human Behaviour in Nigeria and the United Kingdom

At this juncture, Mr. Vice-Chancellor, I propose to give a resume of our contribution to the understanding of management of human behaviour. I have worked and published extensively in the area of Introduction to Psychology, Educational Psychology, Absenteeism and Truancy: Cross Cultural Perspectives, Psychology of Exceptional Children, Psychology of Creativity, Psychology of Intelligence, Psychology of Leadership, Psychology of Adolescence, Psychology of Cognitive styles, Psychology of Personality, Developmental Psychology, Socialisation and Sociometry, and Psychology of Learning; Alcohol, Drugs and HIV/AIDS, Basics of Family Education, Psychology of Human Relations, Management of Behaviour Problems

in Schools, Higher Education and Management of HIV/AIDS and HIV/AIDS Preventive Education: Effective Life Saver.

My contributions find succinct expression in forty articles which were published in *Cibiya: Studies in Nigerian Culture* (See Alhassan, 1987), *Farfaru Journal of Multi Disciplinary Studies* (see Alhassan, 1988), *Education Today, A Quarterly Journal* of the Federal Ministry of Education, Lagos (see Alhassan, 1989), the *Journal of Islamic Academy*, Cambridge, London, (see Alhassan, 1990b), the *Journal of the British Educational Management and Administration Society* (see Alhassan, 1990c), *Nigerian Journal of Counselling and Consulting Psychology* (see Alhassan, 1992a), *Ifepychologia: An International Journal* (see Alhassan, 1993a, 1994 and 1997), *Ghana Educational Media and Technology Association Journal* (see Alhassan, 1999b), *Ghana Journal of Education and Teaching* (see Alhassan, 1999c), *Ghana Journal of Psychology of Educational Development* (see Alhassan, 2001b), and *Nigerian Journal of Open and Distance Education* (see Alhassan, 2004), amongst others.

I have also published 6 Books, 11 chapters in different Books, 2 Monographs and 7 Commissioned works in the area of Rape and Child Sexual Abuse in Ghana (see Alhassan, 2000a), *Understanding Educational Psychology* (see Alhassan, 2000b), *Environment and Early Childhood Education* (see Alhassan, 1983), *Social and Emotional Developments of Adolescence* (see Alhassan, 1997b), *Teacher truancy in Kaduna State: Towards the Management of Disaffection* (see Alhassan, 1998), *The Role of language and Communication in Child Development* (see Alhassan, 1999c), *Towards Sustainable*

Development in sub-Saharan Africa: The Nigerian Dimension (see Alhassan, 1999d), Adult Education for Sustainable Development in sub-Saharan Africa (see Alhassan, 1999e), Psychology and Mathematics Learning: Towards Effective Teaching and Learning (see Alhassan, 2001), The Impact of HIV/AIDS on Development in Africa (see Alhassan, 2001b), Perception of Risk and Action Taken to Avoid HIV/AIDS Infection Among Students in a High-Risk State (see Alhassan, 2003), and HIV/AIDS Poses Danger to Basic Education in Nigeria (see Alhassan, 2003a).

Education has continued to play a unique role in Nigeria's economic development as well as in her social transformation process. Successive governments in recognition of this role, have accorded education a priority in the structure of resource allocation. But government urgently need to meet up with the minimum of 26 percent of national budgetary allocation recommended by UNESCO. Despite the financial involvement of the Federal and State Governments in education many pupils avoid attending state educational establishments. Truancy is a source of wastage to the Nigerian Federal and State Government's investment in education (Alhassan, 1985) and the pupil who refuses to go to school is being self-destructive (Kahn, 1981).

In the United States of America, the problem of school non-attendance has prompted Local Governments to pay the salaries of 'truant officers' in an attempt to deal with the situation. In the United Kingdom there are 'school attendance officers.' For most schools, inspite of these measures, truancy remains an unresolved problem.

Truancy draws more attention to the teenage group than would have been the case, particularly in the U.K., USA and recently, in Nigeria. Truancy is a social and educational problem that knows no national boundaries. The wellbeing of children and adolescents is of value in itself and needs no additional justification. The positive development of young people represents the development of a resource which a community may not ignore.

My Doctoral Thesis of the University of Wales, United Kingdom, entitled 'The Nature and Causal factors of Truancy in Day Secondary Schools of Kaduna State' has proved very useful from the standpoint of policy and practice in Education. This has been demonstrated in terms of the number of papers that have been generated in reputable national and international Journals such as the Zaria Journal of Education Studies (see Alhassan, 1989a), Journal of the British Educational Management and Administration Society (see Alhassan, 1990c), Zaria Journal of Studies in Education (see Alhassan, 1990d), Journal of the Nigerian Teacher (see Alhassan, 1991), Journal of Educational Research and Development (see Alhassan, 1991a), Nigerian Journal of Counselling and Consulting Psychology (see Alhassan, 1992a), Ifepsychologia (see Alhassan, 1993), the International Journal of Psychology in Africa (see Alhassan, 2003) and Ifepsychologia (see Alhassan, 2011), amongst others.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the papers has also helped in policy formulation by Governments and implications for practice by school administrators.

I have successfully supervised ten Master and seven PhD candidates in Educational Psychology. In addition to serving as External Examiner to Department of Education, Bayero University, Kano, I have also served at the College of Arts & Education, University of Abuja where I have examined three PhD theses; also at the Department of Education, Usman Danfodiyo, Sokoto where I have examined two PhD theses, and Department of Educational Foundations, University of Cape Coast, Ghana where I have examined four PhD theses and academic staff for promotions, and at the Faculty of Social Studies, University of Ghana at Legon, I have assessed Academic Staff for promotions. I have also served as permanent reviewer for highly reputable national and international journals.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, with all humility, I am happy to inform this audience that upon my assumption of duty at UNIOSUN, I have been able to work with my colleagues in an atmosphere of mutual respect and tranquillity. Professionally, I am a certified Teacher by the TEACHERS REGISTRATION COUNCIL OF NIGERIA (LA/T/00454). I am a member of the Nigerian Primary & Teacher Education Association, Nigerian Association of Educational Psychologists, Nigerian Psychological Association, British Psychological Association and the World Organisation for Early Childhood Education. Also a Nominee of the Manquis Who's Who in the World, 1999, 16th Edition, 121 Chanion Road, New Providence, New Jersey, USA, and Who's Who in Nigeria, 2010, Achievers Communications Limited, Ikeja, Lagos.

My current research work is on Discovery and Management of Emotional Conflicts Among UNIOSUN Students and Staff. I am also working on Management of some personality problems among students. These foregoing efforts as contributions to knowledge are rather dynamic and continuing process, and thus, are enduring challenges in the profession. This is more so as learning is not only a dynamic process, it is also a continuum; it starts from the mother's womb where the human foetus sucks its thumb and enjoying doing so. There is no end to learning:



Fig.1: The Human Form of the Foetus

The hedonistic principle refers to the tendency to search for what is desirable and move away from what creates discomfort. From this premise, majority of us are working to make Heaven-part of the

cosmos(Gen.1:1,14:19).The place where God particularly dwells and is there served and praised by angels(Isa 66:1,Mt.5:16) Angels are in God's presence to worship him(Heb.1:6,Rev.5:11): If we do, we shall have to learn how to worship, serve and praise God from the angels whose specific duties are worshipping, serving and praising God 24/7,day by day, week by week, month by month, year by year, decade by decade, generation by generation.

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, the next section of this lecture will examine management of psychological stress.

6.0 Management of Psychological Stress

It is quite evident that it is not stress per se that is problematic for us, but rather the amount of stress. An appropriate amount of stress is actually beneficial, and can contribute to a person's effectiveness. Raber and Dyck (1993) states in this regard that a certain amount of stress helps most of us to stay on our toes and motivates us to achieve a standard of excellence.

It is evident that each individual should find the level of stress that is most effective for him/her to perform at his/her peak, since individuals vary in their tolerance for stress, that is, everyone has different levels of internal strength for coping with stress.

Stress is an inevitable part of life. As Selye (1994:5) puts it, 'Stress can be avoided only by dying'. All people – whether they are managers,

children confronted by playground bullies, entrepreneurs trying to sell new devices, or politicians and political leaders – experience stress either, periodically or continuously. Who do we think typically experiences greater stress – leaders or followers? In one sense, the answer is the same as that for much psychological research: It depends. The role of leader certainly can be quite stressful. Leaders face at least one major stressful event at least once a month (Ivancevich et. al., 1986). Follower's stress levels, on the other hand, often depend on their leaders. Leaders can help followers cope with stress or, alternatively, actually increase their followers stress levels.

School teachers face 'universal tensions'. The way we respond to these tensions often define what kind of teachers we become (Alhassan, 1998:152). Within the school system, there are managerial stress that comes often unexpectedly, and often goes deep and hurts. Teachers carrying responsibility are better able to cope with the stress in their managerial task if they can consciously work on it. Thus they have the double job of helping themselves and helping those for whom they are responsible.

Teachers all over the world have been coming to psychology with the expectation that they will learn simple, definite, scientifically proved remedies for their challenges. Teachers can use the following strategies to cope with stress:

- **Personal Strategy:** This includes work strategies, positive attitudes and out-of-school activities. Direct attempts to cope alone with stress in school include switching off, trying to come to terms with each individual situation, self-pacing, keeping work and home as separate as possible, bringing feelings and opinions out into the open, acceptance of the problem and learning the job in more detail. Teachers as individuals can also use painting, gardening, walking, cooking, cycling and praying to reduce feeling of tension, anger, and agitation.
- **Interpersonal Strategy:** The interpersonal strategy which teachers can use include talking over stressful incidents with spouse or family, talking to a friend with a similar job using him/her as a sounding board and 'verbal punching bag'.
- **Organisational Strategy:** This can find expression in good relationships in school where teachers are able to discuss their problems, worries and feelings among their colleagues. It can also find expression in supportive management teams, in-service courses for staff, and from advisers and education officers.
- **Community Strategy:** Teachers can engage in community activities such as football, drama, and choral singing (Alhassan, 2000).

Mentoring as used in education is a sustained 'one-to-one'

relationship between a caring adult and a student who needs support to achieve academic, career, social or personal goals. In particular, personal development mentoring provides guidance in times of personal or social stress. Eliminating this stress may improve academic performance.

Emphasis is primarily in improving students self esteem, behaviours and decision making ability. Personal development mentoring tries to reduce high risk behaviours such as indecent dressing, absenteeism at lectures, rudeness to officials, inducement for favour, disruption of official/academic activities, fighting, destruction of University property, examination malpractice, prostitution, cultism, drug and alcohol abuse, drug trafficking, kidnapping, armed robbery, and introduce them to academic, social, cultural, and recreational activities they may not have had the privilege of experiencing.

Each of us has a limit as to how much stress we can stand before the brain is alerted and changes take place in the hormone system. Our stress quotient is the barometer of our reaction to environment (Alhassan, 1991:45). As has been argued elsewhere (Alhassan, 1990:46) a student who cannot cope with adjusting to his or her environment will probably find learning difficult and stressful. The class, the work groups and the play groups are all social organisations of a kind. Such groups demand healthy relationships from the individual student. A high value is placed on social adjustment in African culture. Hence, teachers and parents provide the child with every opportunity for this (Awoniyi, 1979:90); and it is likely that a good teacher-pupil relationship and someone in whom to confide

could help the adolescent improve upon his emotional adjustment and thereby reduce stress (Alhassan, Ibid.:50).

Other studies on stress among students have also shown that many fresh students (first year students) undergo considerable stress due to demands associated with changes (Taylor & Owusu-Banahene, 2010), while one traditional manifestation of increased stress among college students is a corresponding drop in grade-point average (Alhassan, 1991, Schroeder, 2002).

Since stress cannot be avoided, it is essential to manage stress effectively. Many people believe that stress management means eliminating all the possible stressors in their lives. However, this is not the most effective way to deal with stress. The goal of positive stress management is to harness and control the effects of stress in order to enhance physical and mental power. Positive stress management involves recognising the existence and qualitative level of stress, and then formulating and following a plan of action. For an individual, the following techniques may help you to turn stress into a more positive force in your life.

- i) **Practice a healthy lifestyle:** Practising a healthy lifestyle is one of the best ways to minimise stress. There are no substitutes for balanced nutrition, regular exercise, adequate sleep, abstention from tobacco products, and drinking only moderate amounts of alcohol (if at all) as keys to a healthy life.

A long-term study of the lifestyles of nearly 7,000 adults confirmed these as independent factors contributing to wellness and the absence of stress symptoms (Wiley & Tomacho, 1980). Insufficient sleep saps energy, interferes with alertness and judgment, increases irritability, and lowers resistance to illness.

- ii) **Exercise:** Physical exercise, be it dancing, playing sport, taking part in fitness programmes or any strenuous activity helps to disperse the stress response as well as to re-energise you to help you deal with problems. Research has shown that the fitter you are, the less likely you are to develop physical or mental illnesses. If you are fit, you have more energy and stamina to tackle problems. You also have more resilience when things do not work out well.

Deep-breathing techniques, progressive muscle relaxation, and thinking of calming words and images can be powerful on-the-spot calming techniques to reduce arousal level. They are applicable in stressful situations ranging from job interviews to sports. The effectiveness of these techniques is somewhat a matter of personal preference, and no single one is best for all purposes or all people.

- iii) **Relax:** There are people who do not know how to relax. Many Nigerians are always tied down to their jobs to the extent that

they do not have time for relaxation. You should not be too busy to relax and go on holiday. If you are always too busy, you are endangering your health. We can relax by listening to music, watching television, attending a sports match, reading a book, playing with children, and so on. Famous English Philosopher, Bertrand Russell puts it succinctly: 'if I were a medical man, I should prescribe a holiday to any patient who considers work important. Go on leave at appropriate time. Do not exchange your leave with any pay. If you are not there, the work goes on.' A Yoruba adage says 'It is the office that sees the end of an officer.'

- (iv) Give yourself a treat: Sometimes it is really important to say to oneself in times of stress: "I've had enough. I need a break." Then do whatever you enjoy doing, for example, treat yourself to your favourite groundnut, go to the movies, go shopping or visit a friend. Every human being should know joy. It is immensely important and immediately therapeutic to know some joy each day (Alhassan, 1998).
- (v) Use constructive self-talk: Constructive self-talk is simply what you can say to yourself when you are in a stressful situation. It simply means that you should talk to yourself. This self-talk must be positive to help you cope better than you would otherwise. Instead of saying: "I cannot do this because my abilities are limited", tell yourself, "I will try and maybe I will learn something in the process."

- (vi) **Utilise your time better: Determine your priorities.** Distinguish between what must be done and what you would like to do, and then tackle one task at a time. By planning your time effectively you will find that your stress levels will decrease, and you will be amazed by all the extra time you now have to do all the things you never had time for.
- (vii) **Be assertive: Say “no” to things, people, organisations or committees that demand too much of your time.** Remember that you are only one person with twenty-four hours a day at your disposal. You can only do so much and no more.
- (viii) **Develop an effective support system: We take relationships for granted as humans.** That constant interaction is not only beneficial psychologically but directly to our physical health. Having people to turn to, talk to and rely on has proved to be perhaps the most significant factor in helping people to minimise the occurrence and impact of stressors in their lives and on their health. People who have close ties to others through marriage, church/mosque membership, or other groups tend to be healthier than those with weaker social ties. Also, social supports of various kinds (for example, the supportiveness of one’s spouse, co-workers, or boss) can buffer the impact of job stress (Cummings, 1990).

It is beneficial to be sociable, to smile at people, make more friends and make more people happy. Just like face-to-face relationships, relationships on social networking sites can be

nurtured into a genuine, beneficial relationship. The significance of social support in influencing psychological well-being is recorded in the literature (Adejumo, 2008 & Hardee et. al. 2007).

Social media – websites and applications used for social networking like Facebook, Twitter, Flickr, YouTube, Meebo and Myspace have taken off rapidly in recent years. Facebook was launched initially in 2004 for Harvard University members but has expanded to over 500 million users worldwide. MySpace, which was set up in 2003, has over 200m users and was bought by Rupert Murdoch's News Corporation in 2005 for \$580m. UNIOSUN'S OPAC interface is available at <http://opac.uniosun.edu.ng/chat.htm1>. Twitter API is available on OPAC interface at <http://twitter.com/uniosun>. Facebook Group Forum API is also available on OPAC interface at <http://www.facebook.com/pages/osunstateuniversity>.



Fig. 2: Social Media – Websites Examples

- (ix) Have clear objectives: According to Gericke (1997:24), many of us end up doing too much and too quickly. The reason for this is that we do not sit down and think about what we really wish to achieve. Train yourself to think in terms of objectives. This applies not only to your working environment but also to other activities in your life.
- (x) Be clear about your values: Until you know what is important to you, you will find it difficult to set objectives for yourself.
- (xi) Be systematic when making decisions and solving problems: Learn to break down a problem into manageable components. Gather enough information about the problem and then put it

into perspective.

- (xii) Distance yourself from the source: Try to be objective and see the problem as others would see it.
- (xiii) Adopt a positive attitude and have realistic expectations: Ask yourself what you are going to do about the problem. How can you resolve it? What do you wish to achieve? Remember that the first step towards reaching your goals is having a positive attitude. Be confident and enthusiastic, think positively about yourself and life, recognise your limitations and remember that change can be positive. As already indicated, a positive response to a stressful situation can make your life interesting, challenging and exciting. Watch your thinking. Nigeria is full of negativity. Ensure the negativity in the mind is replaced with a lot of possibility. Consistent negativity eventually leads to depression. When an individual is depressed, the immune system which protects the body from diseases, is suppressed. It is important to consistently work hard to replace your thoughts towards the positive aspect. Is your cup always half-empty or half-filled? In Nigeria today, a vast majority of the country's over one hundred and fifty million people are stressed up as a result of their thinking.

Nigeria in particular and Africa in general is being through a crucible of economic and political upheavals which conjoined to make her a psychological society. The economic hardships

have ushered in debilitating conditions which have introduced psychological trauma in a variety of ways. The most visible ones include poverty, stress, ill-health that goes with poverty, hunger, depression, anxiety over what to eat, where to sleep and even water to drink, sensitivity, negative self-tendencies and full-blown attacks of human beings in form of rape, armed robbery, kidnapping, wanton destruction of property and lives, political and religious bigotry, juvenile and even adult delinquency as well as deep-seated insecurity.

- (xiv) Plan for the unexpected and act promptly: Sometimes the root of negative emotions like fear of failure, lack of confidence and frustration can be found in the fact that you or your subordinates do not plan your work effectively. Therefore, to reduce your stress levels prepare yourself as much as possible for the unexpected. If you receive a task to complete, include it immediately in your planning and do it as soon as possible. Also encourage those working for you to implement this step. Postponing a task will only lead to a build-up of stress.
- (xv) Establish a balance between your professional and family life: Develop interests outside the institution, avoid bringing the problems of work home with you. Discuss a stressful situation with a trustworthy and objective close friend. There is a natural tendency for employees to "hang out" together after work. As long as the time spent together with colleagues does not keep you from spending time with your family, this is

one way of relaxing. Because it is important to be able to rely on your family members in times of stress and to forget about the working environment, be sure not to create another stressful situation at home. Plan for special family times and also find a trusted friend outside the work environment with whom you can discuss the challenges of your job.

- (xvi) **Avoid personalising challenges:** Recognise the difference between an insult directed at you and one directed at the system you represent. Remember the prisoner is “mouthing off at the system”. Don’t get emotionally involved in outbursts.
- (xvii) **Be prepared and knowledgeable:** Stay abreast of new policies and procedures. Ask if you don’t know something. Obtain more information on how to perform your duties more effectively.
- (xviii) **Communicate effectively:** Poor and ineffective communication can put a great deal of pressure on you as well as on the person with whom you are communicating. Research has shown that one of the key sources of pressure is that individuals are not sure of what is expected from them in their jobs. When communication is not clear it is ineffective.
- (xix) **Keep things in perspective**
The stressfulness of any event depends partly on the way one interprets it, not just on the event itself. For example, a poor grade on an examination may be more stressful for one

student than for another, just as a rebuke from a boss may be more stressful for one worker than for another. This is partly due to the fact that individuals invest themselves in activities to different degrees because they value different things. Managing stress effectively depends on keeping things in perspective. This is difficult for some people because they have a style of interpreting events that aggravates their felt stress.

These techniques will enable us to have energy: To have energy is to have the physical and psychological ability to perform. It is a better indicator of long-term leadership success. The first element of energy is physical vitality and stamina. A second element of energy is mental interest. Third, those with energy have a high activity level: that is, they do a lot so they accomplish a lot. An example of someone with both mental interest and a high activity level is Thomas Edison, the prolific American inventor, who managed the business of invention so brilliantly that he becomes the model of the modern scientist. His mental interest was so keen that he would announce his next invention before creating it.

Formulate an Action Plan

It is imperative to let stress work for you, and the only way to accomplish this is to draw up an action plan, like the one below, either for yourself or your subordinates.

Table 3: Identification of Stress Symptoms

Symptoms experienced	Coping technique(s) to be implemented	Time frame	Result

Implement Your Action Plan

Drawing up an action plan can be done very easily, but then it can also very easily become just another piece of paper. In order to be successful you need to implement your plan of action and monitor yourself or those involved continually to ensure that the plan is implemented properly.

7.0 Recommendation

In addition to the strategies and techniques that may help us to turn stress into a more positive force in our lives, there is a general step-by-step approach that appears to be worth consideration. It is recommended that:

- i. The psychological wellbeing of employees and students be part of the organisations' mission and strategic plan,
- ii. A written policy statement about psychological wellbeing and the promotion of psychological wellbeing and the importance of wellbeing be produced,
- iii. A wellness plan be developed that has executive commitment and employee commitment and students commitment. Improving the wellness of employees and students should be a goal.
- iv. The 'improving wellness' goal used as a vehicle for executives and employees and students to create specific and actionable plans.
- v. Organisational resources (for example, funds, space, time) be committed to accomplish the wellness plan.
- vi. Managers be encouraged and rewarded for their involvement in wellness programmes, successes and working to bring about better work life and student life balance.

8.0 Conclusion

Mr. Vice-Chancellor Sir, in addition to understanding what stress is,

we can now identify stress symptoms and isolate different kinds of stress. We also have increasing knowledge of psychological reaction to prolonged stress (anxiety, confusion, indecisions, apathy, burnout, trauma)

Stress is not necessarily a bad thing: stress is, indeed a fact of life, beginning at the moment of our entry into this world and recurring until we leave it. Thus, stress is inevitable within the home, school system or any organisation for that matter. Sometimes emotions do 'run away', mobilising the person so intensely that his muscles become hard to control. But absence of stress means absence of effort. Moderate stress promotes alertness, effort, and learning.

A certain degree of stress is a pre-condition for psychological growth, achievement and the development of new skills; although stress always involves at least some temporary degree of discomfort, it is frequently the occasion for the emergence of creative solution to personal or organisational problems.

Anxiety and depression disrupt people's lives, but they are also informative. By attending to these feelings as they occur, the individual can begin to identify the stressors that provoke them and then take steps to correct the situation. These feelings are signals that important needs are not being met and that one's ability to cope is being taxed. Recognising these feelings and identifying their underlying sources are the first steps in devising methods to cope with stress.

It is imperative for us to manage stress to ensure that it does not interfere with the effectiveness of an institution and is not the main cause for reduced productivity and efficiency.

Finally, optimism, progressive relaxation, social support, exercise, better utilisation of time, and adoption of positive attitude, amongst other management techniques and strategies can help to reduce the impact of stress.

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