Coping Strategies Employed by Students to Address Stress Emanating From Socio-Economic and Academic Challenges: A Study of Nyadire Teachers' College in Zimbabwe

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ABSTRACT

The study sought to examine coping strategies employed by students at Nyadire Teachers' College, to address stress caused by socio-economic and academic challenges. The study employed a purposive sampling technique. The sample comprised seventy students and ten lecturers. Data were collected through structured interviews and focus group discussions. The study found out that both male and female students at this institution of higher learning experienced stress as result of socio-economic and academic challenges such as failing to raise fees, lack of study kits, inadequate stationery, sexual harassment, loneliness, stressful workload and relationship related problems. To overcome the stress, the students employed a variety of coping strategies which included relaxing, listening to music, drug and alcohol abuse, prostitution, engaging in small scale projects, seeking spiritual help and sharing the problems with friends and relatives. Coping strategies such as seeking counselling services, sharing problems with family members and engaging in small scale projects were considered effective coping strategies. The study recommended that colleges ought to have vibrant psycho-social support systems such as counselling to help students cope with stressful situations.

Keywords: academic challenges, coping strategies, dollarization, socio-economic challenges, stress

INTRODUCTION

College life is generally perceived as stressful and beset with a variety of huddles. Socio-economic and academic challenges are among sources of stress among college students. The period of dollarization or use of multi- currency in Zimbabwe, for instance, has brought with it some socio-economic challenges which, notwithstanding the benefits, undoubtedly impact negatively on students in tertiary institutions. The period 2009 – to date has seen a lot of changes in the life of students and parents and, or guardians who support these students. This situation has resulted for instance in high interest rates in banks, price distortion of goods and services, huge debts on individuals and companies, liquidity crisis, unemployment, closure of industries and a general down-turn of social life (Madzingaidzo, 2010). Thus students in order to survive and function in such an environment, have to employ coping strategies.

Studies show that socio-economic and academic challenges cause stress universally; hence the affected individuals need to seek and employ effective coping strategies. Ashford and Lawrence (2006) in their paper presented at Leeds University during a British Annual Research Conference highlighted that students in universities and colleges face challenges such as failure to adjust to new social environment, college dropouts due to psychological problems and failure to handle independence related to college life. The study revealed that the first year students employed different coping strategies which included engaging in

teamwork, social integration, setting realistic targets and effective use of individual tutorials. These strategies worked positively for these students (Ashford and Lawrence, 2006:9).

Kausar (2010) examined perceived stress, academic workloads and coping strategies employed by students studying under semester system in Pakistan. The coping strategies established were grouped as task oriented, emotion oriented and avoidance oriented styles (Kausar, 2010:125).Task oriented strategies are generally problem focused. Students who adopted this strategy took direct action to alter the situation so that the amount of stress could be reduced. Those who employed the emotion-oriented strategy reported that they altered emotional responses to stress. This involved attempts to refrain from emotional responses caused by a stressor. Finally, the group that employed the avoidance-oriented coping strategies indicated that they avoided the situation that stressed them as much as possible, sometimes denying its existence (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984:152). This included attempts to reframe the problem in such a way that it no longer evoked negative emotional responses, thus elicited less stress (Mattin, 1990:223).

Kadhiravan and Kumar (2012) also carried out a study on enhancing stress coping skills among university students in India. In this study, students showed signs of stress such as low motivation, failure to attend lectures, getting sick at times and generally withdrawing from social life. However, the study revealed that students employed less desirable coping strategies such as drinking alcohol, smoking and using illegal drugs. These were a temporary measure to the stress they faced.

Recently, Akindutire, Adegboyega and Adigun (2012) carried out a study on coping strategies among college students in South West Nigeria. The purpose of the study was to investigate the causes of stress and the subsequent coping strategies employed to mitigate the challenges. The study revealed that students employed the following coping strategies; proper time management, proper planning, maintenance of coordinated relationship with guidance, resorting to religious activities, and maximum utilization of available resources.

More recently, Arulogun, Omotosho and Titiloye, (2013) carried out a study on sexual harassment and coping strategies among student nurses in Nigeria. The study revealed that student nurses employed a variety of coping strategies which included breaking relationship with perpetrators of sexual harassment, reporting to local pastors, fight with perpetrator, engaging in verbal confrontation with abuser, seeking counselling services and engaging in self help projects. Although the study focused on nursing students, the findings may be relevant to other institutions of higher learning.

In Zimbabwe, similar studies were carried out on coping strategies employed by students in colleges. Kasayira, Chipandambira and Hungwe (2007) carried out a similar study on the coping strategies employed by University students at Midlands State University. In order to attend to the stress induced by their demanding studies, students at Midlands State University employed the following coping strategies; stealing, cheating, gambling, prostitution, asking for assistance from other students, praying to God, engaging in income generating projects, and maximum use of internet facility on campus. Matangi and Kashora (2012) carried out a study on coping mechanisms for women in tertiary education focusing on Women University in Africa. The study revealed that female students in tertiary education face socio–economic challenges such as exorbitant fees, drastic lifestyle, lack of stationery, family role demands, welfare needs at university just to mention a few examples. The study showed that students at Women University in Africa employed coping strategies such as seeking external financial sources, spiritual guidance, studying at night, forming study groups, and making use of guidance and counselling services at their university.

Mapfumo, Chitsiko and Chireshe (2012) studied coping strategies employed by student teachers on teaching practice. The study which was carried out using student teachers at Africa University showed that students on teaching practice faced a number of challenges which included dealing with difficult students, lack of finance for upkeep, shortage of teaching aids, lack of accommodation, unavailability of teaching materials, unbearable workload, sour relationship with mentor, and strained relationship with other staff members. The students employed a variety of coping skills during teaching practice such as forming social support networks, improvising teaching media, socializing with friends, going to church, beating students and creating leisure activities.

Another study by Muchenje, Gora and Bondai (2013) sought to identify the constraints placed by private sphere responsibilities on the available time to study on women at the University of Zimbabwe's faculty of Education. The study showed that students employed a number of coping strategies which included reducing sleeping time, cutting on social activities such as watching television, doing thorough cleaning during weekends and utilizing the early hours of the day and the late hours of the day to study. All this is evident that a lot of studies have been conducted on coping strategies employed by students in tertiary institutions to address stressful situations. Most of these studies focused on university students. These studies were found relevant to this current study that sought to establish the coping strategies employed by college students at a rural teachers' college in Zimbabwe to address stress caused by socio–economic and academic challenges.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

The study was guided by Lazarus (1991)'s cognitive-motivational- relational theory (CMRT).Embedded within the 'cognitive-motivational-relational theory (CMRT) is the belief that the role of cognitive appraisals in determining one's reaction to a stressful encounter is situational. (Ntoumanis, Edmunds, & Duda, 2009: 250). Lazarus (1991), proposed the cognitive-motivational-relational theory (CMRT) of coping, which highlights the role of distinct positive and negative emotions in the stress. In the CMRT stress is on the continuous, reciprocal nature of interaction between the person and the environment. This means there is an interplay between stress and one's environment (Ntoumanis, et al, 2009: 250). The theory gives premise to three fundamental assumptions: transaction, process and context (Ntoumanis et al, 2009:251).

It is assumed, first, that emotions occur as a specific encounter of the person with the environment and that both exert a reciprocal influence on each other; secondly, emotions and cognitions are subject to continuous change; and thirdly, the meaning of transactions is derived from underlying context (Schwarzer, 2013:235). Essentially, the CMRT links emotion with motivation the argument being that emotions are reactions to the fate of active goal pursuit. Lazarus (1991) says that when one is committed to the pursuit of important goals, one experiences positive emotions from appraisals of smooth goal progress or goal attainment, and negative emotions from appraisals of goal thwarting or delays (Ntoumanis, et al, 2009: 251).

Folkman and Lazarus (1984) in Ntoumanis, et al (2009: 251) view stress not as a stimulus or a response, but as a person–environment relationship that is perceived as taxing or exceeding a person's resources. When faced with a stressful situation, a person evaluates its potential, personal relevance and significance in terms of its impact on valued personal goals. This process is known as primary appraisal.Folkman and Lazarus (1984) in Ntoumanis, et al (2009: 250) also identified a secondary appraisal process. When a stressor is perceived as relevant and significant, an individual evaluates the controllability of the stressor and his or

her resources and options. Thus, secondary appraisals involve situational appraisals of control mechanisms. Different stress appraisals can lead to different coping responses.

According to Folkman and Lazarus (1984) there are two main types of coping strategies: those aimed at resolving the stressful encounter (problem-focused) and those utilized to regulate the unpleasant emotions that arise during the encounter (emotion-focused). Examples of problem-focused coping strategies are planning, increasing effort, consulting and management of priorities (Ntoumanis et al, 2009:250). Examples of emotion-focused coping strategies are distancing, isolation, and wishful thinking. Problem and emotion-focused strategies can be employed to a different extent in the same troubled person–environment relationship (Ntoumanis, et al, 2009: 250). Folkman and Lazarus (1984) emphasized that some coping strategies are not inherently better than others; in fact, effective coping requires a fit between situational appraisals and choice of coping responses (this notion is also known as the goodness of fit model). Specifically, perceptions of controllability of the situation should lead to the utilization of problem-focused strategies to a greater degree than emotion-focused strategies, which are more suitable for situations which are less controllable. However, Lazarus (1991:114) emphasized that coping is a dynamic process with substantial intra-individual and inter-individual variability; individuals might have to utilize different coping strategies at different stages of the same stressful encounter or from one stressful encounter to another (Folkman & Lazarus, 1984: 170).

Also, coping strategies that are effective for one individual might not be effective for another person in the same encounter. Nevertheless, Lazarus (1993) acknowledges that some coping strategies are more stable than others, although he did not subscribe to the trait approach on coping (Endler and Parker, 1990; Krohne, 1996; Ntoumais, et al, 2009:251). The latter approach subscribes to the view that individuals have a preferred coping repertoire (coping styles) which they employ across different situations and which are determined to a large extent by personality such as optimism and extraversion (Ntoumais, et al, 2009:251). Against this background, it stands to reason that students employ different coping strategies as the situation demands and the coping styles differ from situation to situation. Thus, according to Lazarus (1993)'s theory, the type of coping strategy one employs is a function of environmental needs. How the person copes depends not only on the coping possibilities and how they are appraised but also on what a person wants to accomplish in the encounter… the study of coping should never be divorced from motivation (Lazarus, 1991: 115).This study aimed at establishing the coping strategies employed by students at Nyadire Teachers' College to deal with stress caused by socio-economic and academic challenges they faced during training.

STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

A lot of studies referred to in the background of the study show that generally students employ a variety of coping strategies to address stress caused by socio- economic and academic challenges (Kadhiravan & Kumar, 2012; Ashford & Lawrence, 2006; Kausar, 2010; Akindutire et al, 2012; Arulogun et al, 2013; Matangi & Kashora, 2012; Mapfumo et al, 2012; Kasayira et al, 2007 & Muchenje et al, 2013). This study sought to establish coping strategies employed by students at Nyadire Teachers' College to deal with stressful socio-economic and academic challenges. Available literature and studies seem to focus more on coping strategies employed by students in universities and nursing training institutions. According to the researchers' observations not much has been written on coping strategies used by student teachers in colleges. This study therefore sought to address the following main question: What are the coping strategies employed by students at Nyadire Teachers' College to address stress caused by socio-economic and academic challenges?

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

The study sought to explore different coping strategies employed by student teachers' at Nyadire Teachers' College to address stress caused by socio- economic and academic challenges.

RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following questions guided the study:

1. What are the socio-economic and academic challenges faced by student teachers during training?

2. What is the impact of socio-economic and academic challenges on students' social and academic life?

3. What coping strategies do student teachers' employ in order to overcome stress caused by socio- economic challenges?

4. How effective are these coping strategies?

SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

It is envisaged that the findings of this study will benefit all stake holders in education and training which include student teachers, lecturers, Department of Teacher Education and the Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development., in devising effective coping strategies when dealing with stress that befall students as a result of socio-economic and academic challenges:

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research adopted the qualitative research paradigm with a bias towards phenomelogical approach. Qualitative research methodologies have become increasingly important modes of inquiry for both social sciences and applied sciences (Marshall & Rossman, 2011: 1), that explains why it was employed in this study. Merriam (2009: 2) describes qualitative design as a research technique based on the phenomenological paradigm which uses a variety of interpretive research methodologies. Luttrell, (2010) asserts that qualitative research refers to a way of conducting, and conceiving research where the researcher is the key instrument or the tool for designing, collecting, and analysing data. Qualitative research in contrast to the quantitative research design does not translate aspects or issues of the world into numbers to be analysed mathematically. Instead, it analyzes the world through the lenses of the researcher (Schwandt, 2007: 104). Qualitative research is also referred to as a naturalistic research of inquiry into everyday living (Denzin & Lincoln, 2005: 80) where direct observations are made of human behaviour in a natural setting. The case study research design was adopted for this study. This research used a phenomenological case study design because of the need to study selected participants in their natural setting. Yin (2003) defines a case study as a research method which allows for an in-depth examination of events, phenomenon or other observations within a real life context for purposes of developing a theory.

Population and Sample

The population of this study consisted 500 resident students, 400 students on TP and 56 lecturers. From this population a sample of 70 students and ten lecturers was chosen through purposive sampling technique.

Data Collection Instruments

Data collection instruments consisted of structured interviews and focus group discussions. A structured interview involves one person asking another person a list of predetermined questions about a carefully-selected topic (Briggs, 2000:99). Structured interviews were conducted with lecturers and counsellors. The focus group discussion was conducted with students on teaching practice and those residents in college. Chisaka, Mamvuto, Matiure, Mukabeta, Shumba and Zireva (2013: 12) define a focus group discussion as a group discussion in which six to twelve participants talk about a topic relevant to the topic under the guidance of a researcher who will play the role of a moderator.

Data Presentation and Analysis

Qualitative data obtained through structured interviews and focus group discussions were presented in a narrative form following the order of research questions. The narrative data is punctuated with verbatim statements from participants.

FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

Table 1. Demographic Profile of Participants

Intake	Females	Males	Total
ECD Year 1	5	5	10
General Course Year 1	5	5	10
ECD Final	5	5	10
General Course Students on TP	8	7	15
ECD Students on TP	7	8	15
Lecturers from different Departments	6	4	10
Total	41	39	80

Socio-Economic and Academic Challenges Encountered By Students during Training

Data collected from focus group discussions showed that students faced a number of socio-economic and academic challenges. Some of the responses they gave included the following:

1. It is stressful to lag behind others when it comes to paying tuition fees.
2. Things are hard as a result some of us cannot afford pocket money.
3. Some of us do not have study kits such as laptops and computer accessories.
4. Most of us do not have adequate stationery to use during teaching practice and to design models for assessment items.
5. Relationship with mentors is always a nightmare especially when paired with a mentor of your sex among lady students.
6. Multiplicity of responsibilities such as being a student, a wife, a husband, a mother and a father split attention on my study.
7. Overwhelming workload on teaching practice is my major concern.

8. No money to meet the cost for transportation to go for CDS supervision.

9. Sexual harassment.

Similar sentiments were expressed by lecturers who were interviewed. Some of their responses included the following:

i. Relationship related problems are common among students; this could be in campus or emanating from home.

ii. Sexual harassment.

iii. Inability to raise college fees….students are always in arrears in so far as fees are concerned.

iv. Students usually have no money for medication.

v. Some students often have misunderstandings over sharing accommodation.

These responses from research participants showed that students faced a host of socio-economic and academic challenges during the course of their studies. These challenges may be a cause of stress at times as their time and energy was robbed in trying to address them. The time spent away from college trying to raise fees also affects the contact hours of students for their study. If a lot of study time was lost some students would be deferred. This was also noted by Barry (2005: 6) who asserted that parents from poor backgrounds face a challenge of raising fees for their children. Similarly, Chambers and Rogers (2000) summarized four common socio–economic challenges faced by students which include, tuition costs, homesickness as a result of failing to have adequate resources to use in college, depression due to excessive workload and relationship challenges.

Muchenje et al (2013: 514) noted that private sphere responsibilities as a result of socio–cultural factors can pose a challenge among married women in Universities. Students find themselves in a web of several responsibilities causing them to divide their attention. One participant in a focus group discussion lamented: "it's not easy to satisfy all important roles we find ourselves in …." The participant was referring to the splitting demands students find themselves in such as being a mother, a father, a husband, a wife and a student. Similar concerns were noted by Mapfumo et al (2013). Their study revealed that student teachers on teaching practice experience shortage of teaching materials, low allowances, heavy workloads and working with mentors in low morale. One of the respondents during focus group discussions lamented that teaching practice during the first two terms was a nightmare. Students failed to sleep trying to meet the requirements of the following day. This was worse, if students anticipated that the lecturers might come for supervision or assessment.

Impact of Socio– Economic and Academic Challenges on Students

The study revealed that socio-economic and academic challenges impacted on students negatively as shown below:

i. We lose study time in search of fees.

ii. Loneliness causes me to fail to fit in group discussions.

iii. We delay in handing in assignments due to lack of laptops and other necessary gadgets for printing.

iv. Broken relationships can cause stress and affect the desire to study.

v. If assignments are to be typed, some students will be having no money for typing.

Similar views were expressed by interviewees:

    a. Too many assignments which come at the same time will cause a student to breakdown.

    b. If a student is stressed by a relationship problem at college or at home he or she will not concentrate on college work.

These responses show that socio-economic and academic challenges adversely affect students. Failure to satisfy course requirements by any student results in that student failing the course. This was also noted by Okioga (2013: 40) who argued that students from poor families often lack financial resources to buy tools such as laptops to assist in accessing educational resources. Similarly, Amutabi (2003) in his analysis of performance of students from poor backgrounds observed consistent trends. Children from lower socio-economic status families consistently scored lower marks than their counterparts. This was attributed to failure by poor students to have necessary academic tools that would enable them to do well in class; such as study packs, library materials and books. Ozima (2010) in his study in Uganda observed that poor performance in academic work is a result of lack of necessary study requirements and psychological stress emanating from socio-economic and academic challenges.

Coping Strategies Employed By Students

The study found out that students when faced with socio-economic and academic challenges employed a variety of coping strategies. Some of their responses included the following:

    i. I go to church to seek spiritual guidance when I am experiencing a challenge.

    ii. We approach the student affairs department for counselling.

    iii. If they are cases of sexual abuse, we report to administration. What works best however is to ignore or avoid the person molesting you because if you report him or her you may be victimised.

    iv. I sometimes just relax in my room.

    v. We go for entertainment.

    vi. We join social clubs.

    vii. Smoking and drinking help in such situations.

    viii. Selling goods to other students in campus.

    ix. Students fall in love with salaried members of the local community to get financial assistance.

    x. We engage in small scale projects to raise funds such as raising chicken and selling small goods to other students and the immediate community.

Interviews with lecturers yielded the following responses:

    a. Depending on individual students' self esteem, either negative or positive coping strategies may be employed.

    b. Some students engage in prostitution to help them get extra cash.

    c. Sharing the problems with friends, relatives and Chaplin.

    d. Other students steal from others.

    e. Some students abuse drugs and alcohol.

f.   Falling in love with students on Teaching Practice help those in college residence to get financial support.

g.   Students, especially female students, who fall prey to sexual harassment usually, report the perpetrators to administration.

h.   Others engage in piece jobs in campus such as hair dressing and selling wares.

Students employed a variety of coping strategies, which included avoidance oriented and task oriented, to overcome stress emanating from socio-economic and academic challenges. This is in line with observations made by Higgins and Endler (1995) that male students unlike their counterparts preferred avoidance oriented strategies. Female students mostly opt for task oriented strategies which are problem focused. Sharing the same view, Folkman and Lazarus (1984) posit that avoidance oriented coping strategies denote that one wishes to avoid the bad situation at any cost. Such coping strategies include drug abuse and alcohol abuse. Belonging to a social club was found to be a good coping strategy for students who did not drink beer or indulge in alcohol. This was common among female students as they preferred task oriented approach to problem as opposed to avoidance oriented type of coping strategies. One respondent in the focus group discussion said that the advent of technology, in particular the cell phone technology, brought a soothing effect when one is in a stressful situation. Thus one can listen to soothing music like gospel, during stressful events. The researchers observed that this coping strategy was generally employed by students who were lonely or in a broken relationship.

Sexual harassment among female students was reported as one of the serious social challenges students faced. To cope with such a stressful situation students often avoided such lecturers or simply told the lecturer to stop it. Another coping strategy employed by students in such situations was to share their experiences with college counsellor or seek advice from college Chaplin. Findings in a similar study carried by Arulogan , et al (2013) revealed that students who were victims of sexual harassment either reported the offenders to authority, avoided the perpetrators and at times withdrew from situations or places that led to such stressful event.

The study also revealed that some students in order to address the socio–economic challenges they faced, befriended or fell in love with staff members from these departments so that their financial needs may be met. Some students, it emerged fell in love with students on teaching practice. This was said to be the practice among male students in campus and by so doing they would be assured of pocket money and money for other expenses since those on teaching practice receive allowances. One participant during focus group discussion had this to say, "if you catch a student on TP you will not go hungry…". This implies that resident students would propose love to students on teaching practice so that they would be assisted financially.

As a way of trying to raise money for college costs, some students engaged in piece jobs in campus such as hair dressing or hair platting. They do this to raise money for typing purposes and buying stationery needed. It also emerged that some students' especially female students brought goods to sell to other students and members of the Nyadire community. By so doing they raised some money for other college expenses. The things they sold to other students included maputi, pens, sweets, hair piece and exercise books. Some industrious students would go to Mozambique during weekends to buy second hand clothes mostly pairs of shoes for sell to other students and the community at large. From the small wares they sold, students were able to meet some cost related to college life. The interviews with staff in the Student Affairs Department revealed that a sizeable number of female students engaged in

small scale projects to supplement college expenses. On the negative side, some students stole from others goods such as cell phones and laptops and resold these goods at a cheaper price and get money to meet college expenses.

Focus group discussion with students on teaching practice revealed that students also engaged in self help projects on a wider scale as compared to their counterparts in college. Some sold second hand clothes whilst others raised chickens for sell as a project to supplement the allowances they got from college. It also emerged that some did market gardening whilst others did farming though on a small scale. The cash got from these projects was used to buy stationery to use during teaching practice and also to meet expenses on transport to college for CDS supervision. Some students, it emerged, improvised teaching and learning equipments using the locally available materials. Instead of buying ready-made kits from shops students would improvise and make these kits thereby cutting on costs and expenses.

Students employed a variety of coping strategies implying that students do not employ the same strategy even though the challenge may be the same. Kasayira et al (2007) acknowledged that there seem to be differences in preferences of coping styles related to gender. In their study, they discovered that female students used relatively more palliative and compromise positive strategies than male students who use relatively more confrontational positive action. The coping strategies employed by female students in the study included sacrificing lunch to make up for the lost time, cheating where students would bring possible answers on their thighs or under sleeves of their blouses , praying to God, getting assistance from relatives or boyfriends and getting financial assistance from salaried members of the community. This was also observed in this study although no particular attention was given to the gender variable. Similar findings were also noted by Ramya and Parthasarathy (2009:4) in their study on junior college students who employed the following coping strategies to address socio–economic challenges such as seeking sexual comfort as a way to avoid stress; taking analgesics or minor tranquilizers without medical advice; some would take a drink or few bottles of alcohol, some would take mood elevating drugs to help them cope with stress caused by socio–economic challenges. This is in line with Lazarus (1993) who argues that there are no universally appropriate or inappropriate coping strategies although some coping strategies are often better or worse than others. In this respect, individuals have a preferred coping repertoire which they employ across different situations. Thus individuals have a preferred coping repertoire which they employ across different situations.

Effectiveness of Coping Strategies Employed By Students

Generally, students and lecturers tended to agree that some coping strategies worked better for them than others. Some of their responses during focused group discussions included the following:

  i.   Not all coping strategies work well; some may aggravate the challenge especially when one engages in drug abuse and alcohol abuse.

 ii.   Some coping strategies give a temporal solution for example relaxing in a room, joining social clubs and going for entertainment.

iii.   Other coping strategies offer a better solution for example seeking counselling services, approaching the pastor, sharing the problem with relatives.

 iv.   The effectiveness of a coping strategy is best known by the one employing it.

During interview sessions similar views were raised:

a. Some of the coping strategies such as drug abuse and falling in love with salaried members of the community increase the gravity of the problem.

b. Most of the coping strategies such as going for entertainment, doing sporting activities, and relaxing in a room offer a short term help.

c. Coping strategies such as seeking counselling services and attending church services, sharing the problems with peers positively affect students.

Students felt that some of the coping strategies they employed such as drug abuse, alcohol abuse, prostitution and falling in love with salaried members of the community increased the gravity of their problem. Instead of providing a solution students may fail to meet deadlines for submission of assignments as they would be busy drinking beer. Prostitution and falling in love with salaried members of the college exposed students to HIV and AIDS. In a study carried out by Kasayira et al (2007: 26) negative coping strategies such as prostitution and alcohol abuse increased the gravity of socio-economic and academic challenges.

The majority of students felt that coping strategies such as seeking professional help from counsellors or Chaplin, sharing the problem with family members and sharing the problem with peers positively affect students. However, one respondent in the focus group maintained that the effectiveness of a coping strategy rests solely with the one employing it. The participant remarked, "An outsider cannot adequately assess the effectiveness of a coping strategy." This is in line with Lazarus (1993) who argues that there is no universally appropriate coping strategy for a given challenge but maintains that some coping strategies are often better or worse than others.

The interviews conducted with different lecturers revealed that some coping strategies such as engaging in small scale business for students on teaching practice may cause the student to lose focus of their teaching practice. Also, doing part time jobs such as hair platting may robe students' quality time for study. Coping strategies such as listening to music, joining a social club, relaxing in a room and taking a nap were viewed as less effective as they often addressed the challenge temporarily. According to Dubai, Naggar, Alshagga and Rampal, (2011) choice and approaches to coping strategies is influenced by ethnic, cultural and socio-economic characteristics. In this study some students opted for a strategy that best suited their social status. As such, students from well - to do families would opt for drug abuse and alcohol, for some students from poor background often chose easy options such as prostitution as a way to solve their problem and students from minor ethnic groups just chose coping strategies such as exercising and engaging in humorous activities. However, Nancy (2011: 142) argues that different coping strategies employed by students may have different effect in-spite of being the same strategy employed. Students as active human beings constantly change coping strategies until they come across that strategy that best suit their situation. This is also in line with Kausar (2010) who argues that students have a variety of coping strategies at their disposal to try out and eventually settle at that which offers favourable results.

CONCLUSION

The research established that students at Nyadire Teachers' College experienced stressful situations as a result of socio-economic and academic challenges that included raising fees; having inadequate stationery to use during studies; not having appropriate or adequate study kits such as laptops and computer accessories; failing to have friends; sexual harassment; excessive workloads for students on teaching practice; relationship problems; and multiple responsibilities. These challenges negatively affected students in many ways. Valuable time was lost for instance in search of fees and stationery. Some students however opted to resolve

the challenges they faced by employing unacceptable means which later affected them. Against this backdrop, institutions of higher learning ought to be conscious of the existence of socio-economic and academic challenges students face during training. it is prudent for institutions of higher learning to educate students on the different coping strategies they can employ which best suit their situation. Whilst the choice of these coping strategies rests solely on the one executing it, students need to be warned of coping strategies which can increase the gravity of their challenge such as prostitution and alcohol and drug abuse. By all means these challenges needed to be addressed in order for students to do well in their studies.

RECOMMENDATIONS

The study seeks to make the following recommendations:

1. Institutions of higher learning and schools ought to have vibrant counseling services so that students readily access these facilities.

2. Institutions of higher learning could devise a policy where stationery and study kits such as laptops and computer accessories are part and parcel of tuition fees.

3. Ministry of Higher and Tertiary Education, Science and Technology Development could reintroduce and, or redesign the grant and loan facility so that needy students are assisted.

4. Further studies should be done on coping strategies employed by students in institutions of higher learning but using a different research design so as to see if similar findings are achieved.

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