

**FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STRESS AMONG STUDENTS AT A SELECTED
UNIVERSITY, SOUTH AFRICA**

BY

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**A MINI-DISSERTATION SUBMITTED IN PARTIAL FULFILLMENT OF THE REQUIREMENT
FOR THE MASTER OF PUBLIC HEALTH AT THE UNIVERSITY OF VENDA**

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DECLARATION

I Zamakhosi Precious Zondi hereby declare that this mini-dissertation titled: “Factors contributing to stress among students at a selected university in South Africa” has not been submitted previously for any other degree at this university or any other institution; it is my original work in design and in execution and all references used herein has been duly acknowledged.

Ms. Zamakhosi Zondi

Signature: _____ Date: _____

DEDICATION

I would like to dedicate the study to my kids Luyanda and Siphosihle Mathobo for their love and understanding during the course of the study.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I would like to express my gratitude to the Almighty God for leading me this far. To God be the glory.

I would like to thank my supervisor Dr N.S Mashau for contribution encouraging me to work hard and for the love of research.

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I would like to thank the Department of Public Health for teaching, supporting and giving me the opportunity to experience the world of research.

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ABSTRACT

Introduction:

Students in universities are exposed to various stressors which affect them to progress in their studies. The sources of stress are varied and ranging from challenges resulting from family background and history, the present circumstances and the uncertain future.

Purpose: The purpose of the study was to explore factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected university in rural South Africa.

Method: This research employed a qualitative descriptive approach using an explorative design to explore the factors contributing to stress among students at a selected university in South Africa. The study utilised convenience sampling to select participants who met the criteria of inclusion and in-depth interviews were used to collect data. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and protect participants from being harmed were observed in the study. Data was analysed using Tesch method.

Results: The following themes were derived from data analysis: Personal, relationship environmental, academic factors.

Recommendations: Students specific health promotion programmes should be introduced to raise awareness about stress and management of it.

Conclusions: The study concludes that students experience high levels of stress during their studies therefore it is important for the university health authorities to introduce stress management programs for students.

Keywords: Factors, Contributing, Stress, University, Students, Coping strategies

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LIST OF ACRONYMS AND ABBREVIATION

ACHA	American College Health Association
DHET	Department of Higher Education and Training
MPH	Master of Public Health
NFSAS	National Student Financial Aid Scheme
UHDC	University of Venda Higher Degrees Committee
UNIVEN	University of Venda
WHO	World Health Organization

CHAPTER 1

OVERVIEW OF THE STUDY

1.1. INTRODUCTION AND BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Students in higher education are stressed like any other person. Stress among students emanates from the life circumstances and the environment which they interact with at the university. Life and academic stress often generate difficulties and impact students' psychological well-being. Therefore students stress as a result of life challenges and academic load which they fail to cope with. This study is about exploring factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected rural university in South Africa. This chapter presents the introduction to the study, problem statement, research objectives, rationale of the study, and significance of the study and definition of the concepts.

Academic stress has long been associated with poor academic performance among tertiary students (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010). Stress is described as “the adverse reaction people have to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them” (Pandya, Deshpande and Karani 2012). On the other hand Al-Samadani and Al-Dharrab (2013), described stress as “perception discrepancy between environmental demands (stressors) and individual capacities to fulfill these demands”. In simple terms stress emanates when a person fails to adapt to a confronting stressor (Nkem, 2015). In similar fashion Shashank, Beher, Yadav and Behere (2011) describe stress as a result of failure to cope with present, past and future situations. As such stress is viewed from three schools of thought as being response based, stimulus based and transaction based (Hill, et al, .2012). The response based view has its roots in medical school of thought whereby stress is understood as physiological reaction in which the body reacts to a stimuli (Selye, 1956). In regard to stimulus based view stress is understood to be as a life event that necessitates the body to adjust. The transaction school of thought concludes that stress is a byproduct of the relationships of the person and the environment (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Previous empirical studies have concluded that stress weakens the immune system therefore students are at risk of developing chronic mental health problems (Stallman, 2010). In support to this Buchanan (2012) argues that students in institutions of higher learning such as universities are trapped in stressful situations between the period of adolescent and adulthood. Furthermore Stallman (2010) claims that studying at a university contributes further stressors to those of everyday living and these include procrastination, finances and money concerns, study/life

balance, and academic demands (Stallman, 2010). Therefore there is no doubt that most young people are suffering from mental disorder and these include the university students (Gore et al., 2011, Leahy et al., 2010).

Currently global prevalence of stress among university students is unknown because it has not been adequately evaluated, however a number of studies conducted in different higher education institutions shows that indeed students are stressed (Stallman, 2010). However universities in higher income countries such as Australia, Canada, USA and United Kingdom have conducted periodic campus health surveys on mental health issues of students. According to periodic survey conducted in American colleges they showed that about one third of students have been diagnosed of depression and anxiety in the previous year. This can be compared to Australia surveys among tertiary students whereby majority of students were stressed and that their stress was higher as compared to the general population (Stallman, 2010). On the other hand data from United Kingdom suggests prevalence of stress amongst students is unknown however campus health services report suggests that students do succumb to mental health problems (Association of University and College Counseling, 2011). However evidence from national youth surveys suggests that students do suffer from stress and that female students were the most affected group (Youth sight, 2013).

Following international trends, prevalence of stress among students is unknown in South African institutions. However sporadic studies conducted in South African higher education institutions indeed confirm international trends that students are stressed. Govender et al (2015) reported that among first year students concluded that final year students experience stress due to personal problems and academic problems. Furthermore Wilson et al., (2015) at University in South Africa concluded that fourth year dental students experienced stress due to fatigue, expectation to achieve high scores, lack of time, fear of failing, heavy work load, conflict between clinical supervisors and patients being late for appointments. In addition the study reported that student in their final year suffered from stress as compared to those in first year (Wilson et al., 2015).

Naidoo, Van Wyk, Higgins, and Moodley (2014) in their study concluded that medical students experienced stress especially the female students due to the demands associated with family demands. Similar findings were reported in another study conducted by Bataineh (2013), at a Saudi Arabian university which concluded that students experience stress due to heavy academic workload, personal problems, financial difficulties, and high family expectations. In another study conducted by Nandamuri and Ch (2014) among students it concluded that the students were

stressed because of lack of team work during group assignments. Students complained that they were put in groups with some students for assignment and presentations of which some did not attend group meetings. Similar findings were reported in a study conducted in Nigeria among polytechnic students it reported that students were stressed by a number of factors such as demanding modules, examinations, fear of failure, and failing a major module (Nkem, 2015)

Stress has been linked to many known negative implications of stress on personal health, academic performance, social and intimate relationships (Pandya et al., 2012). It has been well documented that stress has negative impact on the health and academic performance of the students'. In this way, stress can impact a person's ability to process information and resulting in negative impacts on learning. Both acute and chronic stress can impact negatively on creativity, flexibility and adaptability (Stixrud, 2012). Academic stress has long been associated with poor academic performance among tertiary students (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010). Failure to cope with stress may induce fears, aggressiveness, guilty and may lead to chronic psychological conditions such as depression and anxiety (Van Zyl and Dhurup, 2016).

According to WHO (2013) indicated that the plan on mental health the priority is centered on collecting more information to improve mental health among the young population including students. The plan emphasised the need to understand the prevalence of mental health problems and the problem there pose, so that there will be able to design strategies to improve student's mental health and to evaluate the effectiveness of strategies .Hence this study seeks to explore factors that contribute to stress among students.

1.2. PROBLEM STATEMENT

The researcher as a student at a University has observed that students' exhibit stress- induced behaviors which cause them to succumb to pressure. Incidences of stress-induced behavior such as substance abuse, attempted suicide, suicide, poor academic performance, non-attendance of lectures and dropping out of programs before the end of the year or semester are common (University of Venda Quality Assurance Report, 2016). According to the cohort statistics of the first entering students from 2012 to 2016 indicates that dropout rate increased from 37% to 56 % (University of Venda Quality Assurance Report, 2017). Reports from the Campus health and counseling unit at the University of Venda indicate that about 80% of students who visit the university clinic present with headaches, sleeplessness and eating disorders which are symptoms of stress. In addition the Campus Health Clinic showed that students frequently present with

stress induced behaviors such as attempted suicide, drug overdose and psychological problems such as depression and stroke. There has been significant increase in stress induced suicidal attempt cases as shown on table 1.

Table 1: Stress induced behaviors among undergraduate students

Year	Suicide attempt	Drug overdose	Psychological Problems	Total
2014	05	07	07	19
2015	10	03	09	22
2016	10	03	17	21

Source: Campus Health clinic 2017

1.3. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE STUDY

The insight gained from the study may assist the UNIVEN counseling unit to understand factors contributing to stress among the student population. Furthermore the results may help the higher learning institutions on how to support the students with stress related problems. In addition, the study may assist management to be aware on the factors contributing to stress and that there may use knowledge to strengthen their policies. The study may also increase body of knowledge regarding student stress by exploring factors that contribute to stress. In addition the study may make students to be aware of possible stressors in the university. This study may also help the University students to manage stress. To this end, once stress is eliminated, student will perform academically hence the university may attain its goal of becoming one of the top universities by 2030 (UNIVEN Strategic Plan, 2016-2020).

1.4. RATIONALE FOR THE STUDY

The researcher contends that research exploring student stress in the context of students from a rural based university is limited. Limited researchers explore rural based student experiences on stress (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010) however this study focused on first year students only.

1.5. AIM OF THE STUDY

The aim of the study was to explore factors that contribute to stress by students at a selected University in South Africa.

1.5.1. Objectives of the study

- To explore the personal factors that contributes to stress among students at a selected university.
- To describe the environmental factors that contributes to stress among students at a selected university.

1.6. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

- What are the factors that contribute to your stress as a student?
- What are the personal factors that contribute to your stress as a student?
- What are the environmental factors that contribute to your stress as a student?

1.7. DEFINITION OF TERMS

- **Factors:** According to Oxford Dictionary factor refers to factors a situation that influences the result of something”. In this study Factors refers to the source of stress among students at the selected university in South Africa.
- **Stress:** In general, stress is defined as “emotional pressure suffered by a human being’ or as ‘great worry caused by a difficult situation, or something which causes this condition” (Jones, 2008). According to Lazarus and Folkman (1984) stress means “real or perceived imbalance between environmental demands required for survival and an individual’s capacity to adapt to these requirements” .In this thesis stress refers to failure to cope with present demands.
- **Students:** Student means any “person registered as a student at a higher education institution (Higher Education Laws Amendment Act 26 of 2010)” In this thesis student refers to a person registered at the University of Venda.

1.8. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The researcher followed a qualitative descriptive approach .the study design that was used is explorative design to explore the factors that contribute to stress among the students at the university. The target population was the registered male and female students for the academic year in 2017, who are undergraduate residing at the university residents’ age from18 to 35. The study adopted convenience sampling to select participants who met the criteria of inclusion. Interviews were used to collect data. Tesch method was used to analyse data. More details on research design and method employed in the study is provided in chapter 3.

1.9. MEASURES TO TRUSTWORTHINES

Rigour in any research is required to prevent error. Rigour is about controlling over the validity and reliability of findings. In qualitative research we then evaluate the trustworthiness of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research. Credibility,

dependability, transferability and conformability were ensured in the study. The process followed to meet the criteria is provided in chapter 3.

1.10. ETHICAL CONSIDERATION

Ethics refers to the principle of respect for person, beneficence and justice (Burns, Grove and Gray, 2013). Ethics guide the conducting of research to enable a researcher to provide a safe environment and protection to the participants of a study. Furthermore, ethics are associated with the mechanism for researcher accountability and responsibility. In research, ethical measures need to be implemented in order to ensure that the rights of the participants are not violated. The researcher ensured that the ethical standard observed. Discussion is provided in chapter 3. Informed consent, confidentiality, anonymity, privacy and protect participants from being harmed were observed in the study. Ethical clearance was sought from the University of Venda Research Ethics committee and permission to conduct the study was from University of Venda Student Affairs Department.

1.11. SCOPE OF THE STUDY

The study was conducted in one university in Limpopo province and it did not include other participants from other universities in the country. Target group were the student who were enrolled at the university from the first year to the 4th level.

1.12. STRUCTURE OF THE DISSERTATION

Chapter 1: An introduction and general orientation to the research report is provided with specific focus on the following. Introduction and background, problem statement research aims, objectives research questions, key concepts used in the study are defined, research methodology, including ethical consideration and measures to ensure trustworthiness mentioned

Chapter 2: Presents the literature review, the findings of the existing literature related to the topic.

Chapter 3: Presents the research design and methodology used in the study and highlight the ethical principles and measures to ensure trustworthiness followed in the study

Chapter 4: Presents result obtained after analysing of the participants transcripts.

Chapter 5: Presents discussion of the findings in relation to existing literature, provide conclusion of the study and recommendation

1.12. CONCLUSION

The chapter provided an overview of the study and how the study is structured. The next chapter present the process of literature review related to the study.

CHAPTER 2

LITERATURE REVIEW

2.1. INTRODUCTION

The literature review is divided into two the theoretical and data based literature. Factors contributing to stress among student population was explored in detail. The theoretical framework was explored in detail and located to the study. Furthermore different coping strategies are also reviewed in depth.

2.2. FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STRESS AMONG UNIVERSITY STUDENTS

2.2.1. Personal Factors as sources of Stress

Personal factors mean those factors which belongs to or affecting a particular person rather than anyone else. (Stallman, 2010). Some of these factors are as follows;

2.2.2. Poor health problems

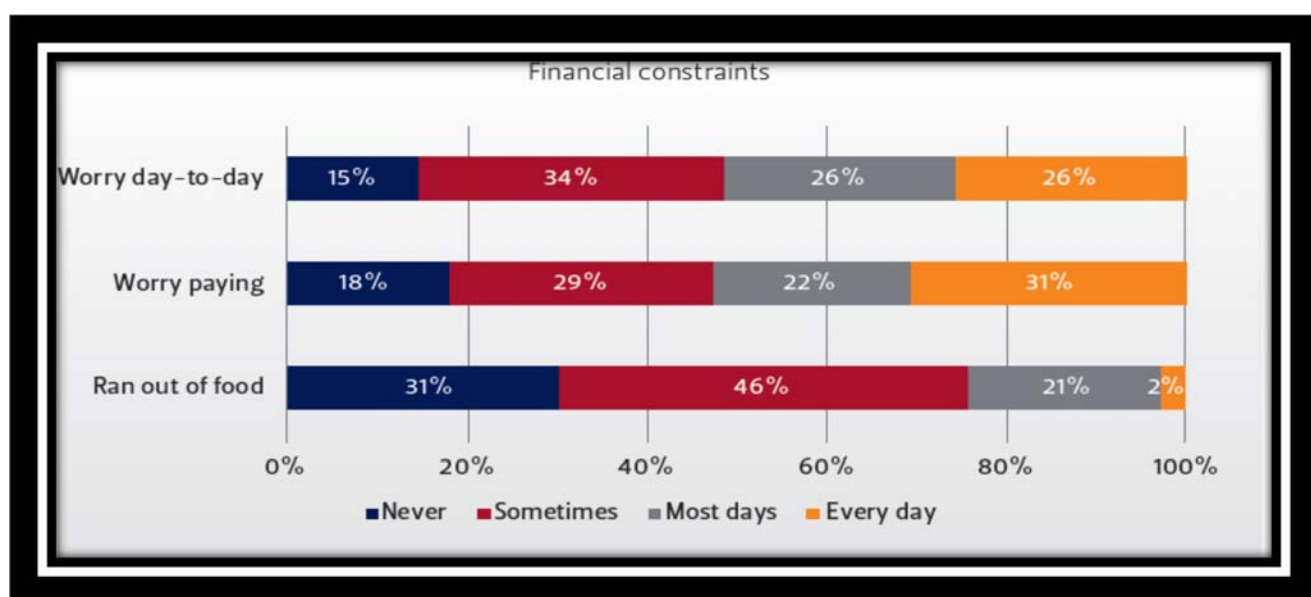
Poor health problems are associated with stress among student populations. Trombitas (2012) indicated that stress at university students is associated with the health problems. Cheung et al., (2016) in their study showed that students who have poor health or health problems experiences stress as compared to the ones who were healthy. In another study conducted by (Ansari and Derakshan 2011) it confirms that having a diagnosed disease is associated with poor quality of life which can be stressful. In addition university students operate in a new environment in which they are supposed to cope with new demands therefore failure to adjust has been associated to mental health problems such as depression (Roh, Jeon, Kim, Han and Hahm, 2010).

2.2.3. Financial Difficulty

Existing evidence suggests that financial difficulty is also a source of stress among students. Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) in their study revealed that students in South African universities were stressed by financial problems (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010). Yusoff, Rahim, Baba, and Esa (2011) concurs in his study it was found that students from poor backgrounds experience more stress. As such it is very likely that poor students who come from poverty stricken communities were likely to struggle with financial means to meet their needs. Therefore students who hail from poor backgrounds were found to have depression as compared with ones from high income background (Chen, et al., 2013 and Demirbatir, 2012).

The financial distress emanates from the fact that they struggle to pay for rent, food, and clothes (Mudhovhozi, 2012). For example a study according to a South African Surveys of Student Engagement Annual Report (2016) showed that students financial worries are centered on meeting basic needs such as accommodation, food and subsistence needs. (See figure 1).

Figure 1: Student financial constraints



Source: South African Surveys of Student Engagement Annual Report 2016

In addition Mapfumo, Chitsiko, and Chireshe, (2012) in his study among student teachers indicated that the main source of stress was financial problems. Source of worry in this study emanates from the fact that student teachers were struggling to They reported that they had to use their own pocket money to buy teaching aid materials, food, and pay for transport costs. Others reported that they even had to pay rent during teaching Practice as the host school did not provide accommodation for them .The stress was exacerbated by harsh economic conditions currently experienced in Zimbabwe.

2.2.3. Poor lifestyle

Poor lifestyle factors among university students are linked to stress. Previous evidence conclusively associate that poor lifestyle such as poor diet, lack of exercise, sleep was linked to the development and treatment outcomes of depression (Lopresti, Hood and Drummond, 2013). Research on adolescents by Jacka et al (2010) reported that poor young people experience stress due to poor lifestyle. In another experimental study German et al., (2011) shows that poor diet is

linked to stress or depression. Adolescents who consumed more junk food such as burgers and pizza were more likely to develop depression in the long run (German et al., 2011). According to Cheung et al (2016) people with poor sleeping habits were more likely to suffer from stress.

2.2.4. Lack of Entertainment

Stress and anxiety was also found to be caused by lack of entertainment among students. For example an experimental study showed the students who were deprived of entertainment were more likely to have depression symptom than those who have entertainment (Cheung et al., 2016)

2.2.5. Family problems

Home problems have an influence on students stress. Students who experiences family problems at home are likely to have stress or depression themselves (Yusoff et al, 2011) and Demirbatir et al., 2012). According to a study conducted Deb, Strodl, and Sun (2015), reported that students who came from dysfunctional homes were more likely to experience academic stress because no one support them in their homework (Deb, Strodl, and Sun, 2015).

2.2.6. Life changes

Stress among young people is caused by transitions which young people undergo through their transitions such as marriage, new job, moving away from family. Sudden changes in life situations are at the roots of stress for many of people. Although change is good, too much change is a problem. For example getting married whilst at school has been shown to be associated to stress among student couples (Heckman and Montalto2014 and Fieldman, 2011). According to a study conducted by Abasimi, Atindanbila, Mahamah, and Gai (2015) in Ghana among diploma nursing students it indicated that the findings reveal that married respondents experienced stress as compared to single students. (Abasimi et al., 2015).

2.3. ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS CONTRIBUTING TO STRESS AMONG STUDENTS

2.3.1. Poor infrastructure

According to Lazarus and Folkman, (1984) stress is a by-product of the person and environment. The environment in which students live impacts on their stress. For example a number of studies have shown that students find it difficult to cope with the new environment such as university life

because they have to juggle academic and social issues (Nkem, 2015). Furthermore it has been seen that the living condition among students may contribute to stress among students. For example students who live in poor and shared accommodation are likely to be dissatisfied with the accommodation hence stressed. Therefore being dissatisfied with the environment is stress (Leary and DeRosier, 2012). For example according to a study conducted by Cheung et al, (2016) among nursing students who lived in a noisy dormitory were more likely to have stress symptoms. On the other hand Nkem (2015) cited student dissatisfaction with the studying facilities as a source of stress. It was reported in the study that students experience stress due to lack of study material, proper laboratories, equipment and poor accommodation.

2.4 ACADEMIC FACTORS AS A SOURCE OF STRESS

Academics has been cited as a major stress among university students. For example according to a study conducted in China by Sun, Dunne, Hou, and Ai-qiang (2013) students were more stressed by their academics. This has been attributed to a strong culture of academic achievement in Asian countries. In another study conducted Malaysia among medical students it was discovered that most students were stressed by test, examinations, heavy workload, time constraints and poor performance in tests (Yusoff, Rahim and Yaacob 2010). In addition the way tests and exams are structured was found to be inducing stress among students ((Harikiran et al., 2012 and Shah et al., 2010). Also a study conducted by Pillay and Ngcobo, (2010) reported that students were stressed by failing, fear of failing and actual failing. The situation was compounded by the fact that most students came from poor rural backgrounds so majority of them came to university unprepared (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010).

This was also confirmed by an American survey students feel an increased drive to succeed academically and worried by the high workload they encounter (American College Health Association, 2012). Similar findings were reported by Nkem (2015) in Nigeria that revealed that high levels of stress were about fearing the exam, doing original assignments and projects

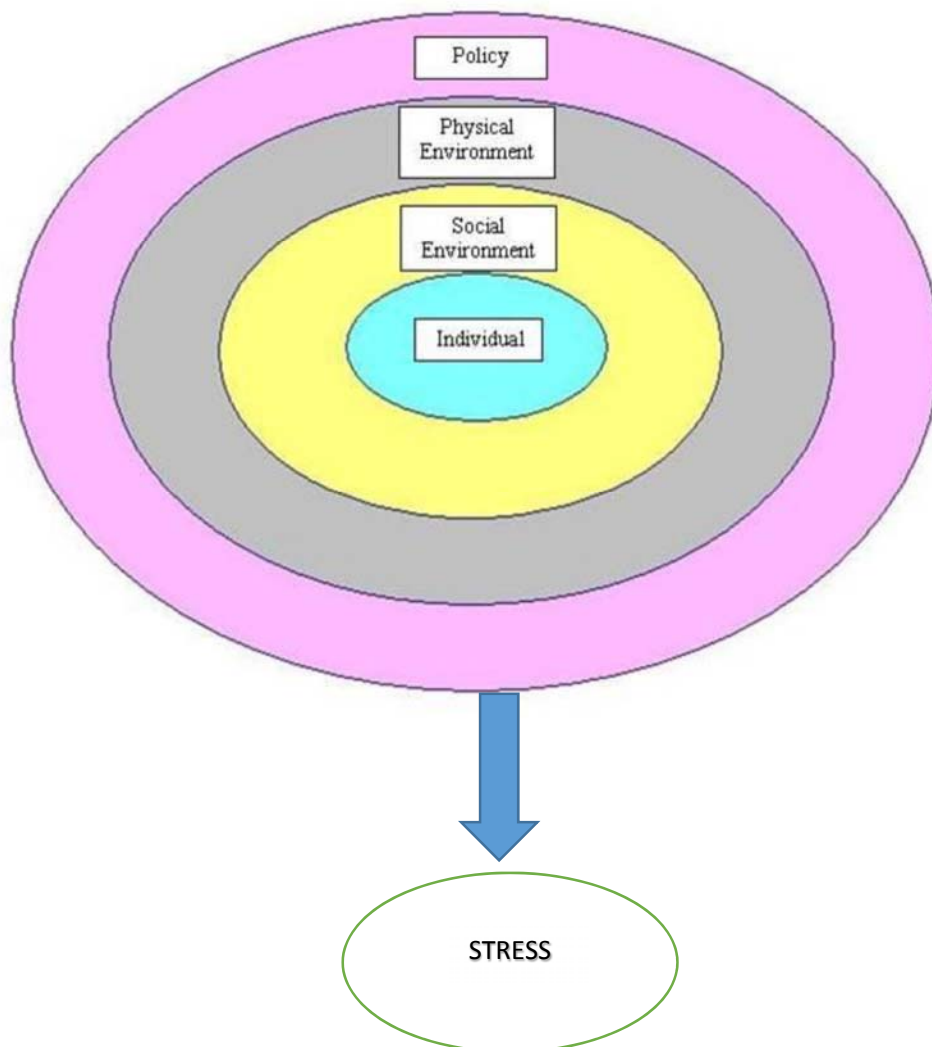
without plagiarism, making out time to prepare for examinations, getting a very good cumulative average, and continuous poor performance.

Nandamuri and Ch (2014) found that students in India experienced stressors due to team work. Definitely, since these formal groupings were mixed with different people with different likes. Other socio-personal issues such as engaging in co-curricular activities (Matriculation, convocation, orientation, and students' union issues), uncertainty about future career after studies and maintaining focus on academic vision moderately stressed the students. This is understandable, given that some students do not bother themselves with co-curricular activities, future careers and academic vision. However, since these issues presented moderate stressors to the students, they need to be tackled before the students become severally stressed from them

2.5. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study was guided by Socio ecological approach by Stokol, (1992). A social ecological approach is a comprehensive approach to the explanation of human behavior. This approach “suggests that human behaviors are not only affected at the individual level, but they are also affected by various levels of influence. In this study social ecological model was used. According to Stokol (1992) there are four levels of influence which are personal, social, physical and public policy. Personal factors entails to those individual person factors such as characteristics and the social environment entails relationship factors. The physical is the environment such as the families and workmates. Figure 2.illustrate a number of factors that contribute to stress based on the socio-ecological model.

Figure 2. Levels of Influence in the Socio-Ecological Model



2.5.1. Application of the socio-ecological model to the study

The socio-ecological model informed the approach to studying factors that causes stress in this study. Stress was conceptualized to be influenced by individual, interpersonal and environmental factors in a dynamic and ongoing manner. As suggested in Socio-ecological Model, policy, legislation, and organizational contexts within which individuals are engaged can also impact stress. Given “the interactional nature of the relationship between individuals and their environment, stress is both a determinant of health and consequence of daily life (Lazarus, 1991).

The ecological systems theory maintains that it is vital to note that an environment and its immediate settings actively shape the outcome of an individual's life. People do not live in isolation but rather within multifaceted structures that contain their immediate settings, social networks and traditional communities established in a wider social structure.

Stokol (1992) and Bronfenbrenner (1989) proposed that people are both producers and products of their development, which means that a human infant is naturally prone to act on his or her surroundings. They also states that people have distinct features that invite or reject responses from the environment and in so doing they foster or discourage development (Bronfenbrenner, 1989 and Stokol 1992). One of the main assumptions of the ecological theory is that an individual and his background both have an impact on each other (Green, 2011). In summary smoking is a byproduct of many factors therefore, the overall goal of this study is to explore factors contributing to stress from a Socio ecology model perspective.

2.6. CONCLUSION

The aim of chapter two was to explore what is known about what stresses students in tertiary education. The reviewed literature shows that students like the general population experiences stress due to a variety of factors. Most authors suggests that stress among students is a by product of personal problems, poor relationships, academic challenges and also misadjusting to the new environment.

CHAPTER 3

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlined the following: qualitative research design, study setting, target population, sampling method and data collection, instrument, data analysis and measures of trustworthiness, and ethical considerations.

3.2. RESEARCH DESIGN

A qualitative using an explorative, descriptive and contextual in nature was utilised in this study. The qualitative approach is used to gain a deeper understanding about the problem in a particular area of a researches' interest and it seeks to explore the phenomenon (De Vos, Strydom, Fouche and Deport, 2011). The rationale for using qualitative design is because it allowed the students to explain freely what stresses them. Furthermore the researcher chose qualitative because most research about academic stress has been done using structured questionnaires. So the researcher is of the view that by simply replicating a structured questionnaire targeting students is unlikely to further advance our understanding of stress among students. Therefore the study used explorative and descriptive approach to explore factors contributing to stress among students at a selected University in South Africa. A descriptive approach provides an accurate account of events thoroughly and accurately.

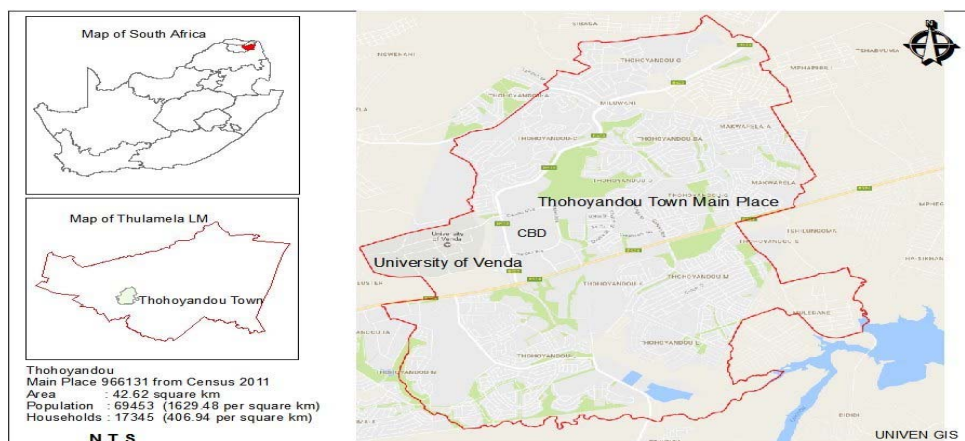
3.3. STUDY SETTING

The study was conducted in natural setting, the investigator interviewed the students in their settings at the university residences. According to Brink et al (2012) a natural setting refers to an uncontrolled, real life situation. Therefore setting is the location where a study was conducted (De Vos De Vos, A.S. Strydom, H., Fouche and Delport,.2011) The study was conducted at the University of Venda located in Thohoyandou Limpopo Province in South Africa. UNIVEN was established in 1981 as a branch of the University of North currently known as the University of Limpopo (Turfloop). The branch became independent in November 1981 when the University of Venda Act (Act 19 of 1981) was passed by then Venda Parliament. UNIVEN is situated in the fast growing town of Thohoyandou in the Limpopo Province on the southern side of Soutpansberg

Mountains. The University of Venda is based in a remote rural area and recruits its students mainly from historically disadvantaged rural backgrounds where schooling is poor.

According to Times Higher Education, (2011) the UNIVEN is ranked 3590 in the world. The university consists of eight schools which include a foundation centre for matrics students with low marks to enrich their grades. The schools offer a range of under- and postgraduate academic programmes in various classifications of educational subject matter. As a comprehensive institution, the UNIVEN offers a variety of undergraduate and postgraduate programmes in various fields of study. These programmes lead to qualifications in undergraduate certificates diplomas, first and professional bachelor degrees, postgraduate diplomas, honours, masters (both by coursework and research) and doctoral degrees. Schools are mandated to develop the critical performance indicators of the academic project: teaching, learning, research and community engagement (UNIVEN Strategic Plan 2016-2020). Currently the University has one campus which is based in Thohoyandou. Student enrolment patterns indicate that UNIVEN is predominantly an undergraduate higher education institution. Figure 3 depicts map of Thohoyandou (**Figure 3**) where UNIVEN is located.

Figure 3. Univen Map



3.4. RESEARCH POPULATION

In this study the population were all students enrolled for 2017 academic at the UNIVEN of Venda. Polit and Beck (2010) views population as a group of elements that comprise characteristics of interest to a researcher and who meets the specific characteristics that a researcher has predetermined. According to Botma, Mulaudzi, Greef and Wright (2010) the target population is the entire set or aggregation of objects, persons, behaviours or events or any other single unit of a study sometimes called element of single unit that meet a sampling criteria. The population for this study were all students registered for academic programmes at the UNIVEN. In 2017 student population amounts to 15 655. For the purpose of this study the researcher focused on students who stayed in university residences. The researcher did not interview the entire population, a sample was drawn to determine participants for this study. There are about 2,636 who resided in the university residences. (See table 2) below.

Table 2: Student distribution in residences

Residences	Male	Females	Total
PREFABS	189	189	378
BERNARD NCUBE		200	200
MANGO GROOVE		250	250
F3	369		369
F4		400	400
F5		300	300
LOST CITY	180	180	360
CAROUSEL	123		123
RIVERSIDE	128	128	256
Total	989	1647	2,636

3.4.1 Sampling.

The researcher used non-probability purposive sampling to select residences and convenience sampling to select the participants. Non-probability is a procedure in which all of the persons, events or objects have an unknown and usually different probability of being included in the sample (Polit and Beck, 2012). In this study the sampling procedure is categorized in two steps, first it was the selection of residences at UNIVEN and then selection of participants. This is described in detail as follows.

3.4.1.1 Sampling of residences

The study used purposive sampling, to select all residence at UNIVEN. A purposive sampling is a sampling that is based on researcher's judgment regarding the subject of interest that the researcher wants to study about (Brink et al., 2012). All the residences were selected because they have the students who meet the criteria of inclusion.

3.4.1.2 Sampling of participants

In selecting the participants convenience sampling was used to select participants who were readily available at their residences during data collection. At the residences students are allocated according to their level of study. The researcher visited each residence and selected participants that were readily available until a desired number was reached. According to Grove, Burns and Gray (2014) sample size in qualitative was determined by data saturation which was 24 participants. In addition, Polit and Beck (2012) stated that the sample size is determined by the quality of data collected. In this study a sample size of 24 participants was envisaged, of which 5 students were selected per residence. However, the number was determined by data saturation which was 15 as the final number. In selecting the participants the researcher used the following criteria:

Inclusion criteria

- Registered students at the University of Venda for the academic year 2017
- Willing to participate in the study
- Residing at university residence
- Undergraduate students

Exclusion criteria

- All post graduates
- Students residing off campus

3.5. DATA COLLECTION

Data collection refers to a process of gathering information on targeted variables in an established systematic fashion (Burn and Grove, 2015). According to Greeff (2015) interviews allow the researcher to understand the world from the participants' point of view and uncover lived experiences.

3.5.1 Data collection Instrument

The researcher used in-depth interview as an instrument for data collection. The interview guide was designed based on the purpose of the study and the following main questions: 1. 'What are the personal, relationships, academic, environmental factors that contribute to stress for you as a student? (See Annexure 3). The researcher utilised interview guide because it allowed probing hence rich in-depth data was collected. All the interviews were conducted in English as all the participants were literate and they understood the language well.

3.5.2. Pre test

According to Lo Biondo and Haber (2014) pre-test is a small study conducted from a large scale study. In order to test the practical aspects of a research study, the researcher can conduct a pre-test. The aim of pretesting was to investigate the feasibility of the study and to detect possible flaws in the methodology, inaccessibility to the sample of the proposed study (Brink, Van der Walt and Van Rensburg, 2012). Before the actual study was conducted the researcher pre-tested the interview guide among undergraduate students staying off campus. A pretest study was conducted to assess the competence of an interview schedule, the researcher in order to uncover any practical difficulties that could derail the main study. Five students residing off campus were selected purposefully for the exercise. For the purpose of this study, the researcher interviewed five respondents to check the validity of the instrument. Some adjustments were made to the follow up questions to allow for deeper probing. Semi structured interview was used.

3.5.3. Data collection procedure

According to Grove et al., (2014) an in-depth interview is a method used to elicit a clear picture of the participant perspective on the research topic. During in-depth interviews, the person being interviewed is considered the expert and the interviewer is considered the student. The researcher's interviewing techniques are motivated by the desire to learn everything the participant can share about the research topic (Polit and Beck, 2012). This study employed semi structured interview to collect data and the permission to collect data was granted by the University of Venda Higher Degrees Ethical Committee.

Prior data collection, the researcher met with the block representatives for each residence in order to make appointments with recruited students. The researcher and participants arranged to be interviewed in the comfort of their rooms for those who are not sharing rooms to ensure privacy.

Time for interview was flexible to suit the study schedules of the students, this was done to avoid disturbing the students.

The researcher explained to the participants what the study was about and each participant was requested to sign a consent form. (See Appendix 4). Data collection was done within 14 days and data saturation was reached after a total of 24 participants were interviewed. Pseudonyms were used so as to maintain confidentiality and the participants were informed about the use of them. All participants were asked one central question: namely 'What are the factors that contribute to stress for you as a student? In addition to this the researcher probed deeply in order to gain clarity and clear understanding. The following question was asked:

- What are the factors you consider to be source of your stress at your university?

The researcher asked the main question and the rest of the questions were determined by how each participant answered the central questions. The interviews took place in private comfortable rooms of the participants and English was used as the mode of communication. The interviews lasted between 45 minutes to an hour. A voice recorder was used to capture the details of the discussion during the interview. Data collected from participants was immediately transcribed after each session. Field notes were used to record the setting or the environment and nonverbal cues.

3.6. DATA ANALYSIS

Since the study was qualitative in nature, qualitative data analysis was used. An independent coder was consulted and identified 4 themes 18 subthemes. Tesch `open coding method steps of data analysis were used to analyse data. The data was classified into logical thematic categories based on the study objectives. It is used when data collected would be from narrated experiences and perceptions of the participants. Qualitative data analysis was conducted and categories developed according to Tesch`s method (Creswell, 2009). Thematic analysis was adopted as suggested by the eight steps of Tesch:

- All the transcriptions were obtained through taking down all the notes while the participants were talking. The transcriptions were carefully read with an understanding of making sense of the whole document, and the researcher wrote down some ideas that came to mind.
- The researcher picked one most interesting document from the interviewed documents, read it to find out what was it all about.

- The participant's opinions were written down in themes and made a list of all the topics and similar themes were grouped together.
- Lists of themes were applied to the data and themes were abbreviated as codes which were written next to the appropriate segments of the texts in order to see if new categories and codes emerge.
- The researcher found the most descriptive wording for the themes and turned them into categories that relate to each other.
- The researcher further made a final decision on the abbreviations for each category and alphabetized these codes.
- The data material was assembled according to their belonging to each category in one place.
- The researcher recorded all the existing codes and developed them on the basis of the emerged information collected from participants by using codes and suitable data to them, by using some combination of predetermined data and emerging codes.

3.7. MEASURES TO ENSURE TRUSTWORTHINESS

Rigour in any research is required to prevent error. In qualitative research we then evaluate the trustworthiness of the findings. Lincoln and Guba (1985) described four general criteria for the evaluation of qualitative research.

3.7.1. Credibility

According to Polit and Beck (2010) credibility refers to the confidence in truth value of data and interpretations. It deals with questions such as how congruent are the findings with reality? How the reader believed the study findings (Creswell et al., 2016). There are number of strategies that ensure probability of credible findings which are considered by the researcher in this study which are prolonged engagement, persistent observation, triangulation, peer debriefing, and member checking (Denzin and Lincoln, 2011).

The confidence in the truth was established through the following techniques:

Prolonged engagement in the field: The researcher stayed in the field for four weeks until data saturated was reached. In this way the researcher gained an in-depth understanding of the phenomenon as well participants' perceptions or views, and experience (Brink et al., 2012).

Persistent observation: The researcher consistently looked for interpretation in various ways through a process of continual and tentative analysis and determined what counts and what not

(Brink et al., 2012). The researcher ensured persistent observation by paraphrasing, summarizing, observing nonverbal cues and consistently pursuing interpretations during the data collection stage.

Triangulation: In this study, the researcher ensured triangulation by using different methods. The research used two different methods following the central question to collect data. The researcher further used several resources were used such as field notes, observations and audio-tape (Brink et al., 2012).

3.7.2. Dependability

Creswell et al (2016) refers to dependability as the provision of evidence such that if repeated with the same or similar participants in the same context, its findings are the same. In other words it refers to stability of data over time. This is the alternative to reliability as described in quantitative research. In this study the researcher ensured dependability by describing the research findings, interpretations and recommendations, using an auditable trail. A tape recorder was used to increase reliability of all the interviews.

3.7.3. Transferability

Transferability is a strategy to ensure applicability. Drake, Szmukler, Mueser, and Thornicroft (2011) refer to transferability as the extent to which data of a specific study could be transferred or applied to other people in a similar context. The expectations for determining whether the findings fit or are transferable rest with the potential user of the findings and not with the researcher. In this study the researcher provided a complete thick description of the research findings from field work enabling the reader to relate. The researcher provided a complete description of the research findings and verbatim quotes from individual interviews to ensure applicability of the study to other contexts. The researcher requested a senior lecturer with research experience to read the transcripts and to identify major themes so that the supervisors can have a clear picture of the findings.

3.7.4. Conformability

It refers to the potential for congruency of data in terms of accuracy, relevancy or meaning. Conformability in this study was ensured by use of a statistician. This was supported by integration of an audit procedure where the researcher described all the research processes, explaining and justifying what was intended and the reasons for undertaking decisions. The researcher did a substantial review of the literature so as to identify the similarities and differences and verification of whether the literature supports the findings.

3.8. ETHICAL CONSIDERATIONS

Ethics refers to the principle of respect for person, beneficence and justice (Burns, Grove and Gray, 2013). Ethics guide the conducting of research to enable a researcher to provide a safe environment and protection to the participants of a study. Furthermore, ethics are associated with the mechanism for researcher accountability and responsibility. In research, ethical measures need to be implemented in order to ensure that the rights of the participants are not violated. The following aspects were applied to ensure adherence to ethical considerations:

3.8.1. Ethical clearance

The proposal was presented at the School of Health Sciences Higher Degree Committee for quality assessment. After meeting the requirements of the School of Health Sciences Higher Degree Committee, the proposal was submitted to the University of Venda Higher Degree Committee for quality assessment and approval. Then ethical clearance was granted by the University of Venda Research and Ethics committee. **(Find attached Appendix).**

3.8.2 Permission to conduct the study

Permission to conduct the study was requested in writing from the University of Venda Student Affairs and it was granted. Furthermore, the researcher sought permission from the study from participants. **(Attached Appendix).**

3.8.3. Right to informed consent

For this study, written consent was obtained from the participants (Annexure 4) before the commencement of the interview to ensure that they all participate out of their will and knowing what are they involved in. In order to receive consent, a researcher provided an individual with sufficient understandable information about his or her participation in a research project (Annexure 1). Information for this study was provided in written form and it includes the identification of the researcher, the study topic, the purpose, and objectives of the study. The participants were also informed that the study was for academic purpose only. All essential information were presented and discussed with participants in order to ensure their understanding (Brink, et al., 2013).

3.8.4. Right to anonymity, privacy, and confidentiality

Anonymity refers to keeping the participants name unknown to the public (Brink, et al., 2013). Participants name should not be linked with his or her data. The anonymity and confidentiality of interview data was maintained. No identity of the registered students was referred to in any way

and at any time that could harm them. Individual interview participants were assigned numbers instead of using their names. These numbers were used during the whole process of data collection, as well as during data analysis. The participants were informed that confidentiality would be maintained and personal information would not be disclosed by using pseudonyms (De Vos et al., 2011). Data produced during the interviews was kept private and only the researcher and the supervisors would have access to research data.

3.9. CONCLUSION

The chapter outlined the research methodology used in the study by the researcher in order for her to collect in- depth information regarding exploring factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected rural university in Limpopo. The research design, study setting, population of the study, research instruments, data collection procedure, data analysis, measure to ensure trustworthiness and ethical considerations were thoroughly covered in the study. The next chapter will discuss the results.

CHAPTER 4

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

4.1. INTRODUCTION

This chapter outlines the results and discussion of the study findings. In order to protect the identity of the participants, numerical codes were allocated to distinguish the participants. This chapter provides presentation of the results and discussion of the study findings. Stress can be contributed by various factors that include interpersonal, intrapersonal, academic and environmental concerns. The aim of the study was to explore factors that contribute to stress by students at a selected university in South Africa. The research was conducted at the University of Venda in South Africa. The results of the study are presented in line with the objectives of the study as follows:

1. Explore the personal factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected university.
2. Describe the environmental factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected university.

4.2. DEMOGRAPHIC OF THE PARTICIPANTS

Table 3 below shows that most of the participants were aged between 18- 25 years. Fifteen were females and nine were males. All of the participants were single, and they resided at the university residences. All levels of undergraduate study were represented that is from level one to four.

Table 3: Demographics of the participants

Demographics	N	%
Age distribution		
18-25	18	75
25-30	6	25
Gender of the participants		
Females	15	63
Males	9	38
Residence		
F3	3	12

F4	4	16
F5	5	20
Lost city girls	2	8
Lost city boys	2	8
Carousal	5	20
Mango grove	2	8
Bernard Ncube	2	8
Marital status		
Single	24	100
Level of study		
1st year	6	25
2nd year	6	25
3rd year	6	25
4th year	6	25
Total	24	100

4.3. .PRESENTATION AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY FINDINGS

For the purpose of this study the researcher used the Tesch model of data analysis as outlined by (Creswell, 2003). The participants were asked the following central question: ' what are the factors that contribute to stress for you as a student?'. Probing questions were asked as a follow up on the answers given by the participants. An interview guide (Appendix) was used to guide the researcher during data collection. Data was transcribed verbatim in order to record accurately the information provided by participants. Four major themes emerged from the collected data, and the researcher coded sub-themes under each theme (Table 4). During the analysis of data from the participants in this study, the following themes emerged:

1. Personal factors

2. Relationships factors

3. Academic factors

4. Environmental factors

The following table outlines the summary of the finding of the in-depth interview with the participants.

Table 4: Summary of the findings

Main Theme		Sub-Themes	
1.	Personal factors	1.1. Financial difficulties	
		1.2. Worry about future	
		1.3. Poor time management	
2.	Relationship factors	2.1. Poor relationship with roommates	
		2.2 .Poor relationship with lecturers	
		2.3. Poor relationship with partners	
		2.4. Poor relationship with classmates	

		2.5. Poor relationship with parents	
		2.6. Poor relationship with students	
3.	Academic factors	3.1. Fear of failure	
		3.2.Exam schedule and format	
		3.3. Failure to qualify for exam or test	
		3.4. Choosing the wrong degree and career	
		3.5.Failure to adapt to university life	
4.	Environmental factors	4.1. Poor accommodation facilities	
		4.2.Poor academic facilities	
		4.3.Climate related stress	
		4.4.Challenges of life	

The following results describe the major themes that students brought out in their interviews, followed by some sample statements in their own words

4.4. Main Theme 1: Personal Factors

Intrapersonal stressors refer to stress that result from internal sources (Ross et al., 1999). These are events experienced by the students, independent of their interpersonal or environmental relationships. Students described personal factors as contributory factors to their stress. This theme emerged from the data analysis. Sub-themes that emerged from personal factors as a contributory to stress are as follows: financial difficulties, worry about future and poor time management.

4.4.1. Sub –Theme :Financial Difficulties

Experiencing financial problem and being in debt was always a worry among students. In this study majority of the participants revealed that financial problems which they experience are the source of high level of stress. All (24) of the participants reiterated that financial problems is the main cause of stress in their lives as students. For example the following extract support this:

“Eish! NFSAS is giving us R600,00 per month for food, the money is not enough, the food get finished before the month end I find myself being stressed since I don’t know where am I going to get food, I won’t be able to concentrate in my studies with the empty stomach, my parents are not working they rely on social grants and cannot afford to give me money for food and to pay the rent from the owner of the room since I am squatting due to lack of accommodation in the campus” (Participant 2).

“NFSAS pay late around July, from January I was struggling not having food to eat, no place to stay, I kept on requesting friends a place to sleep and to eat. my parents are not working, I was given the money to register at the university by my pastor hoping that the NFSAS will pay immediately and I will be covered with everything but it was not like that” (Participant 8).

“I am a student , I rely on my parents financially and the pocket money is not enough since I have to buy food and to maintain myself so it stresses me when my girlfriend is being proposed by a working man who drive cars who can manage to provide for her since I cannot as a student” Participant 7).

Financial stress refers to failure to meet one’s financial responsibilities (Northern et al., 2010). Students are part of the larger South African society and are stressed financially too. The results reflect the economic decline in South Africa which has heightened the financial stress experienced by students. Students in this study highlighted that they were unable to meet basic needs such as food and accommodation and also that the pocket money is not enough to cover life expenses. Similar findings were reported from a longitudinal study of student finances in Australia. The study indicated that more than two-thirds of students worry about their finances and was in financial stress due to increase in higher education costs (Stallman, 2010). In a similar study conducted among college student in the USA, it suggest that majority of students were stressed due to financial problems (Trombitas, 2012).

According to Lim et al (2014), lack of finance is a second largest stressor among university students. Financial problems among students include loans, cost of the degree, and paying their debts after completion of their degrees. According to Department of Higher education students from disadvantaged backgrounds experiences financial challenges. They do not have enough funds to cover their fees and cover all their basic needs. Despite the government providing funds through NSFAS it is not enough to cover the needs of the students (DHET, 2015). Most of the

students at the UNIVEN come from poor backgrounds in which parents cannot afford to pay for tuition fees and meet the basic necessities therefore students are likely to be stressed. From a holistic perspective the stress to which students are exposed mirrors the milieu of a modern day South African life.

4.4.2. Sub-theme Worry about the future

The study revealed that the worry for the future was a source of stress for the senior students. Being a student is a phase characterised by anxiety about the future which is triggered by what is happening in the job market. The concern of job opportunity in future and the economic and political conditions have caused the students to worry and became burdensome to the students and consequently lead to high level of stress. The idea of not getting a job upon graduation seems to be the main contribution to high stress level.

The findings are illustrated in the following vignettes:

“After studying this degree I am not sure what I am going to do because employment opportunities are drying up by each day” (Participant 4).

“Ooh my God I can’t just see my future things are upside down I don’t know what am going to do after these three years” (Participant 7).

“What is happening mzansi is interesting they said we should go to university we are here but they are no jobs, corruption is everywhere it stresses me big time” (Participant 8).

Similar findings were reported by university students in the United Kingdom who were worried about their future job prospects concerns. Majority of the students revealed that they were worried about what were they going to do after completing studies and in addition this stress about future employment has an impact on academic performance (Scotland, 2010). This is also in line with studies conducted in Nigeria and South Africa whereby students reported the fact they know a lot of people who graduated and they are unable to find jobs and this stresses them too (Madzhe, 2015 and Nkem, 2015). According to Guo, Wang, Johnson, and Diaz (2011) reported that college students experience academic stress because of the economic downturn that includes employment conditions, economic outlook, and financial burden. Hence the highest rates of stress are experienced by final year students.

4.4.3 Sub- theme Poor time management

Another theme which emerged from this study is that poor time management among students is the major contributor of stress. For example participant 2 described this clearly: *“Life here is fast, I missed two of my modules because I had a hangover for the previous day, and therefore I did not submit my two assignments I am not sure if the guy is gonna give me another chance”*

This is congruent to a study conducted by Adebale (2016) at Benin University in Nigeria among faculty of education students. In addition, the study showed that poor time management is the major contributor of stress among university undergraduates. This finding is in line with that of Maisamari (2012) who identified poor time management as a source of stress. This is so because students who fail to manage their time effectively may experience some form of stress, especially when it is time for tests and examinations. They find themselves reading all night in order to cover the course outline, which more often gets them stressed, some fall sick and are rushed to the hospital or the university health centre. For instance full time students are faced with academic demands such as writing assignments, preparing for classes, test , end of year examinations, group assignment along with other social commitments makes it difficult for students to adapt therefore eventually stresses them (Abdullah and Mohd, 2011 and Esia-Donkoh, 2014).

4.5. Main Theme: Relationship Factors

According to Ross et al. (1999), interpersonal sources of stress are stressors that result from interactions with other people. In the present study, the interpersonal sources of stress with significant associations are poor relationship with roommates, lecturers, partners, friends and parents.

4.5.1. Sub-theme: Poor relationship with roommates

The majority of students identified poor relationships with roommates as cause of stress. The participants narrated difficult experiences concerning their relationships with roommates and it was source of considerable stress in their lives. The respondent had difficulties in terms of bonding with roommates and this made life difficult for them in such a way that they were failing to adjust. About 12 respondents felt overwhelmed and considered leaving university at one point in time.

“Roommate decide to switch on the radio high at night while I am studying, or we buy food together she invites her friends over they eat all the food when the food get finished she go and eat in their rooms and I am left with nothing to eat I have to wait for the month end for the parents

to deposit the money for food and last semester I almost left for another university” (Participant 5).

“If I find the owner of the room with the girlfriend I have to go outside to give them privacy and I do not know where to go, sometimes he tell me that his girlfriend will visit him for the weekend I have to go home and I cannot go home because home is far. I will ask to sleep over to my friends room and they are overcrowded as well I will be even feel embarrass to request food” (Participant 6).

Conflicts with roommates are another source of stress among university students and even affect the academic performance. This is similar to a study conducted by Madebo, Yosef and Tesfaye (2016) at the university in Ethiopia among health sciences students demonstrated that students who had high levels of stress were the ones who had poor association with their friends, and roommates. In another American study majority of the students reported that conflicts with roommates were very stress and affected their academic performance. The students reported numerous experiences of roommate conflicts, interracial tensions, and disagreements with residence staff as a source of stress (American College Health Association, 2012).

4.5.2. Subtheme: Poor relationship with the lecturers

In this research most the participants revealed that poor relationships with the lecturers or instructors are another source of stress among students. Some participants attested to this by saying:

Lectures they dwell much on Venda language and I miss a lot of information since I am not a Venda, I am a Swati speaking person (Participant 14).

I was not getting along with my lecturer since she was interested in my girlfriend. After he realize that I was not happy about he started giving me lower marks I was not qualifying for that course so I end up going to him to apologise so I can be able to pass, but I am ok now(Participant 10).

“Some lecturers are very rude it is difficult to approach them when I have a problem and lecturers do not care whether you are passing or failing, they are not available to help you if you do not understand the modules”(Participant 11).

Similar finding were reported in a study conducted among students in Ireland who mentioned bad relationship between students and their tutors were source of stress because students did not understand the way they taught. Hence students failed a number of students who did not go for practicum in the final year (Deasy, Coughlan, Pironom, Jourdan and McNamara, 2014). In line with this study Wu et al., (2015) reported that international students experienced stress due to the

fact that they had difficulties in communicating with their professors due to language barriers, cultural differences, and different expectations from professors. Receiving criticism from supervisors about academic or clinical work was one of the sources associated with significant stress (Wu et al., 2015). In another study conducted by Nkem, (2015) in Nigeria it was found that conflict with lecturers was a serious stressor among students. The students complained about the inapproachability of lecturers during office hours and this presented severe stress to the Home Economics students.

4.5.3. Sub-theme 3 :Poor relationship with the partners

In the following narratives various participants showed that conflict with a partner causes them to be stressed.

My boyfriend is not supportive enough he lose temper when he have to help me with school work (Participant 1).

My girlfriend cheated on me with my friend and that affected me negatively a lot in my studies and you have to share your time with the person you are in relationship with. sometimes it differ with the personalities of the person and spending time trying to fix the relationship it consume time and it affects my studies (Participant 14).

This is line with a study conducted in Ethiopia which concluded that students who had unsatisfying relationship with their partner, friends and relatives reported high level of stress. Furthermore this is confirmed in a study conducted by Madzhie (2015) among university students in South Africa suggested that physical abuse among partners is a major contributor of stress among students. Similar findings were reported by Draper Clarke and Edwards (2016) in their qualitative study among students, teachers revealed that married students fight with their husbands at home. The students narrated that conflicts started when she decided to be teacher then the husband was against the idea and she felt that the trust between them had broken down. She felt resentful that she had supported him financially when he was starting his businesses, but now he was not willing to support her.

The study findings are a reflection of what is happening in South Africa which has one of the highest incidences of domestic violence in the world. Every day, women are murdered, physically and sexually assaulted, threatened and humiliated by their partners, within their own homes. Organisations estimate that one out of every six woman in South Africa is regularly assaulted by

her partner. In at least 46 per cent of cases, the men involved also abuse the children living with the woman (Famsa, 2017).

4.5.4. Sub-theme: Poor Relationship with parents

Some students continue to feel significant pressure from their parents to achieve. Poor relationship with parent or family members has been identified as a factor which contributes to stress among student. Student shared the following:

“My dad is very strict I am pregnant and very much afraid to go home, because I do not know what my dad will say or do and this has been stressing me for months which it also affected my school work negatively” (Participant 7).

Participant 9 confirmed this by saying

“No support from the family they do not call to check if I am coping at the university, how is the exam no good luck for exam like other parent, they only is to shout that I am not studying when I fail the module, they assume its because of the boyfriend, they cannot differentiate high school and university, they do not ask about the result they just see that you are back from the university and say ok that means you are done writing”.

According to a study conducted by Alemu et al., (2014) at an Ethiopian university revealed that student teachers were stressed because they had poor relationship with parents. A similar finding was reported in a quantitative study in Ethiopia those students who were in conflict with their families were stressed as compared to the ones in good relationships. Similar findings were reported by Pillay and Ngcobo (2010) were higher frequency of stress was related to conflict with family. Tangade et al., (2011) explain poor relationships between students and parents are caused by high parental expectations for the student to pass. For instance, students who are enrolled in degree programs that they are not interested in due to parental pressure are associated with fear of facing parents after failure experience greater stress than those who joined degree programs of their choice (Tangade et al., 2011).

4.5.5. Sub –Theme 5: Poor relationship with friends

The majority of the students reported that poor relationship with friends is one of the important causes of stress. To confirm this, the following are some of the comments from the students.

One female participant (10) said;

“When my friends gossip about me, someone told me I confronted them which leave the friendship sour it stressed me a lot”

Another female participant (12) further confirmed

“When my friends take my special clothes and abuse them. I have to get a working boyfriend who will buy me things so that I can fit in the group”

One male participant 4 said

“My friends are having girlfriends I did not have and I did not want because I wanted to focus on my study, friends used to tease me saying I am gay. I felt I should proof to them that I am not a gay by getting a girlfriend that I do not even love”.

This is consistent to a study conducted by Madebo, Yosef and Tesfaye, (2016) at a university in Ethiopia among health sciences students which revealed that students with high levels of stress were the ones who had poor relationship with their friends, and roommates. Another study from the USA has reported that the prevalence of depression was higher amongst students with roommates (ACHA, 2012). Therefore, strategies designed to improve the quality of interrelationships among University students might promote their mental well-being. Students who report low levels of social support are more vulnerable to the effects of stress, and more likely to report life dissatisfaction and even suicidal behavior (Chao, 2012).

4.6. Main theme 3. Academic Factors

The present study identified academic factors as one of the major influencing factor in causing students to be stressed. Most of the respondents identified fear of failure, exam schedule, too much workload, and failure to qualify for exam, are attested academic factors that contribute to considerable high level of stress among students.

4.6.1. Sub- theme: Fear of failure

The majority of the respondents cited that they are always worried about failing tests, assignments and exams as a cause of their stress. The following comments attest to this:

First year female participant (11)

“I get worried when I am going to write a test that I might fail, it is stressing me”

A pair of male student 15 also said that,

“I am using the bursary I fear of failing the test that I may not qualify to write exam failing one module the bursary withdraw from paying my fees .i stress that if I can fail where will I get the money for tuition fees.

Similar results were reported by Draper Clarke and Edwards (2016) in their qualitative study among student teacher reported that students’ fear of failure contributed to stress. According to a study conducted by Kumari and Jain (2014) among students at an Indian university, the study revealed that there was correlation between examination stress and anxiety of college students. In another study conducted at Saudi Arabian university academic stress was found common among undergraduate students registered in the faculty of education at the King Saud University. This study investigated the academic stressors experienced by the students at university. It was found that fear of failure is the major source of stress among undergraduate students (Bataineh, 2013; Mudhovozi, 2012).

Exam anxiety refers to combination of physiological over-arousal, tension, worry, dread, and fear of failure that normally occur before or during test situations (Fisher et al., 2016). Wintre et al (2011) argued that exam stress is contributed by the fact that most students enter university with high anticipation for high grades which they fail to achieve. However, previous research conducted in Canada shows that students find it difficult to achieve high grades at university than they did at high school. Therefore it is beyond doubt that students who were used to achieve higher grades at high school could feel stressed because they no longer perform at the top of the range (Wintre et al., 2011). This makes students to panic feeling, overwhelmed and discouraged therefore experience stress.

Kumaraswamy (2013) explains that fear of failure could lead to feeling of inadequacy in students. This could explain why most of the students expressed academic stress as their major sources of stress. When students are academically stressed they can be emotionally disturbed. Hence the unprecedented emotional and mental breakdown experienced by students often appears to be more common towards the examinations. It could equally account for why some students advanced reasons to initiate and cause uproar on campus to distort the commencement of examinations. The emotionally unstable students that are maladaptive would likely take advantage of any crises pro-situation on campus (Kumaraswamy, 2013).

4.6.2. Sub-theme: Exam schedule and format

In the present study majority of the respondents mentioned that the way exam timetable is structured can be stressing in such a way that students can write all your core modules in one week. All of the respondents explained that *“you find that we are writing four modules in the week, its too much pressure and it causes a lot of stress because I do not have much time to study”*

This is line with a study conducted by Hashmat et al (2013) which confirms that exam schedule and formats were cause of stress among students due to the fact of the duration of the exam and insufficient knowledge on how to write an exam. Elias, Ping, and Abdullah (2011) in their study also found out that taking exam two times a day bring stress to students. Similar findings were also revealed in study conducted in Brazil reported that medical students at Goias University were stressed because they wrote too much tests within the same week (Pereira and Barbosa, 2013). However a study conducted among medical students in Saudi Arabia revealed that too many examinations in the same week was not a source of stress because they were using a reformed problem based learning curriculum (Soliman, 2014).

4.6.3. Sub-theme: Choosing wrong degree and career

Too much work has been identified as the major cause of stress among respondents. Examples of participants' comments that support these findings are provided below.

“My degree is having too much courses from different departments such as Department of Health, Business management, Agriculture, Economics and Maths, it has many assignment and a lot of test which stresses (Participant 17).

“Having a lot of courses and research where I have to balance between the modules and research, it is too much work and it is stressing, there is too much work that we did in the class from January ,it is not easy to remember the whole chapter, the lecturer do not give scope to study everything. It became difficult to pass” (Participant 14).

This is in line with a study conducted by Nkem, (2015) at Nigerian study among home economics students the study revealed that failure by student to master the curricula and demands of the curricula present as a source of stress. In this study students were confused by module such as minimum requirement of credit hours which students have to fulfil the minimum requirement through class work, completion of assignments and projects and complying with the minimum attendance requirements. Perhaps, one of the reasons why the students experienced severe

stress due to unclear information on required credit units per semester and delays in releasing examination time-tables and results is because the lecturers who should clarify the information and release timetables or results on time were not always available and approachable.

As found in a study conducted in Glasgow in the UK, medical students generally experience difficulties in adapting to unfamiliar curricula and the inherent academic demand (O'Rourke et al., 2010). This is in line with studies conducted by Habeeb (2010) and Siraj et al., (2014) in Malaysia which revealed that also medical students stress as a result of vast workload, lack of recreation time, insufficient study materials, periodic exams, regular assessment, breadth and depth of the modules. Yusoff et al (2013) commented that medical students are expected to grasp a lot of information before classes in a short period of time, therefore the inability to cover and master the information creates worries, frustration and eventual stress. O'Rourke et al., (2010) commented that stress associated with medical training leads students to be unable to concentrate and solve difficulties hence depression develops. Similar findings from India suggest stress among students was associated with enormous curricula, lengthy modules, and frequent examinations (Habeeb, 2010).

Students in a problem based curriculum reported that better quality of life, perhaps because of the spare time available for self-study and the greater freedom and autonomy to manage their time (Tempski et al., 2012). This is also in line with a study conducted by Kasa and Tesfaye, (2017) among medical students obtained stress from taking care for patients, lack of care and guidance from teachers, unfamiliarity with patients' diagnoses and treatments, unable to provide patients with good medical care and lack of experience and ability in providing patient care.

4.6.4. Sub-theme: Failure to Qualify For Exam

One of the sub themes which emerged from the data was that students are stressed due to failure to qualify for final exam. All the participants' responses revealed that failure to qualify a final exam contributes to a high level of stress among students. The following verbatim suggest that failure to qualify for exam is a source of stress for students who are under pressure.

“Written two tests but the lecturer put the marks for one test, I told him but he refused to rectify, therefore I did not qualify to write exam I had to repeat the module” (Participant 8).

I am doing year courses which have five assignments I have to pass before qualifying for exam, I already failed three assignments, I am working under pressure. I do not know if I will qualify” (Participant 9).

In another study among medical students’ performance in periodic examinations was the most frequently and severely occurring sources of stress (Shah et al., 2010). Othman et al., (2013) conducted a study among health sciences students at a Malaysian university having poor marks in examination was identified as a source of stress. Grades are very important for university students. Davidson et al (2012) reported that seven in eight students were concerned with their grades. Baghurst and Kelly (2014) pointed out that the sources of evaluation stress in university students were academic stress, examinations, and results. This is not surprising considering grades are important for scholarships and job applications. The grading system sometimes motivates many students towards higher levels of achievement and good grades rather than focusing on simply learning. Moreover, the results revealed that females performed better than their male counterparts. Arising from these investigations is the conclusion that the level of perceived academic stress is very high among undergraduate university students. The shrinking labour market and employers’ obsession for talent have increased the challenges for students in universities to achieve higher academic grades for improved employability (Waqas et al., 2015). This resonates with the fact that most commonly cited source of stress for students is academics (American College Health Association, 2012). Therefore, the competitive economic environment is also responsible for the high grade expectation and stress in higher education.

4.6.5. Sub –theme : Failure to adapt to university life

The findings revealed that majority of the first year students failed to adapt to ever busy university life cited therefore it contributed to stress. This change of life event from secondary school to university causes significant stress among student because they are anxious about change of education level, make new friends and sometimes it means total change of friends and lifestyles. The findings are illustrated in the following vignettes

“Eish I am here at the university alone what am I going to do because I don’t know anyone” (First year participant 12).

“Being here it is a stress because it not like you are at home where you can go out to night clubs at night and come back early in the morning and sleep the whole day”(First year Male student (14) participant).

This is in line with a study conducted by Madzhie, (2015) among first year psychology students who reported that life changes from high school to university stressed them a lot due to the fact that they were coming to a new environment. Similar findings were reported by Stallman (2010) who reported that first year students experience stress when trying to adapt to the new setting especially when it comes to negotiating new friendship and as well adjusting to their degree. The stress among the students is exacerbated by the fact that most of the students in the previously disadvantaged institution in South Africa hail from poor rural areas in the country. Therefore they have to adapt to the rigorous academic requirements of the university and to urban lifestyle which they are not used to. For example, majority of students are unable to adjust to university life, academics and socially therefore they perform dismally and eventually fail leading students to be stressed (Van Breda, 2017). First year at university can be a very stressful period of social and academic change (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010). It is a time when students experience social challenges such as moving away from home, making new friends and being introduced to a new environment. These, together, with academic challenges, which include demanding coursework and a heavy academic work load, can be stressful (Pillay and Ngcobo, 2010).

4.7. Main Theme: Environment Factors

Environmental stressors refer to physical surroundings in the university which can set off the stress response including new and unfamiliar situations. Environmental stressors are problems that arise due to the environment, such as noise, crowding, pressure from university environment (that arises outside of the academic process), and work or family pressures. The present study revealed that poor accommodation, poor study facilities, and heat are causes of stress and family pressures.

4.7.1 Sub theme: Poor accommodation facility

The study showed that poor accommodation facilities at the university are source of stress for the student. Majority of the students narrated that they live in dilapidated student accommodation which are poorly maintained and overcrowded. The following statement attests that the living condition causes high level of stress among students.

“The university does not have enough accommodation, you have to qualify with 65% to get accommodation, if you do not qualify, and we have been sharing the room being four and its stresses a lot because sometime I am from the class tired I need to sleep. I found others sleeping or playing the music” (Participant 2).

“University residence is dirty, cockroaches everywhere, some students have sex in the showers, sanitary pads everywhere in the shower (Participant 15)

“the neighbors play loud music in late hours securities are not doing anything about it, students are smoking everywhere, and no water every weekend you cannot concentrate the environment is smelly you cannot go to the toilet when there is no water it is unbearable, you cannot bath, cook, and clean it is very stressful”(Participant 16).

This is congruent to a study conducted by Aduale (2016) at Benin University in Nigeria where more than half of the students indicated that that they were not happy with accommodation arrangements at the university with a number of them being forced to look for alternative accommodation in the nearby high density suburbs. Julia and Veni (2012) in their study of stressors faced by university students found accommodation as one of the major problem faced by university students which stressed them. In another study conducted by Alemu et al (2014) among student teachers in Ethiopia revealed that uncomfortable accommodation, and working environment stressors like shortage of water, electricity, climate and food, were the source of stress.

In another study conducted by Kasa and Tesfaye (2017) revealed that students who lived in universities residence were stressed due to the state of living conditions of hostels, their infrastructure such as size of rooms, number of roommates, cleanliness of the hostel, canteen facilities), social support systems and social environment of the hostels were not conducive for university students. At the UNIVEN majority of students found their accommodation difficulties stressful, due to the fact that many of them are from different rural areas therefore do not have place to stay. Secondly, the financial problems impact directly on the students' ability to secure accommodation. Thirdly, the university's rural location also makes it difficult for students to obtain proper accommodation in surrounding areas. While the university does have its own student residences, these are obviously limited. Having a safe place to live has long been recognized as a fundamental human need (Maslow 1943), and for a student to study without this need fulfilled will certainly prove stressful and an interference in academic performance.

4.7.2. Sub theme : Poor academic facilities

Insufficient studying facilities have been identified as a cause of higher stress among students. Majority of the student revealed that they do not have enough books, computers and venues to do their class work. The following sentiments attest to this:

“Not having enough computers to do school work at the lab you are given only two hours to use the computer which lapses before you finish the work” (Participant 3)

“not having enough books at the library ,when you are given the assignment ,you find that the are two copies of the books and in class you are more than 50 those who arrive first at the library will take the books keep it and returned after the due date of the assignment” (Participant 5).

“not having enough classes to attend as social workers we sometimes attend classes under the tree or in stadium” (Participant 6)

In a study conducted by Mudhovozi (2012) reported that student at that university did not have a proper lecture venue, they had a roving classroom always. Similar finding were also discovered by Nkem (2015) at a Nigerian university where she discovered that poor classroom environment, limited time for practical activities and inadequate facilities for practical works, were also among the severe academic stressors to the Home Economic students. This finding may be because many previously disadvantaged universities in South Africa have insufficient resources for learning and practical work. For example many students at UNIVEN use overcrowded venues where they learn whilst standing and lecturers do not utilise audio visual material despite their availability. This causes severe stress among poor students. This finding is consistent with earlier studies by (Joseph 2009) which revealed that poor classroom environment and inadequate facilities were causing students a serious problem hence impacting on academic performance.

4.7.3. Sub theme: Climate Related stress

Most of the participants bemoaned the hot weather conditions as stressing. University of Venda is situated in one of the hottest regions of South Africa, therefore without proper studying and accommodation the searing heat is a stress factor to reckon. Due to abnormal temperatures school related activities are affected due to the fact that students are unable to finish the assignments on time. Participants 8 had this to say *“The weather is too hot, I am unable to study, no air conditioners and cannot open the window because there are monkeys and cats that can*

enter the room” and “the environment is too hot, when you have to attend classes that are far and the lecture classes are too small, they cannot accommodate everyone”

This is in line with a study conducted among international students in Finland. Cold weather was identified as a major contributor to their stress. Winter in Finland starts from October this is when the weather is getting cold and darker than normal and international students complained about the cold weather other than culture. International students have to endure adjusting to a new weather (Omodonna, 2012). In another study conducted by Mala-Aduli (2011), found out that international students were stressed about cold Tasmania winter in Australia. According to Heal and Park (2016) the human body and brain are highly sensitive to heat stress. Emerging scientific research suggests that climate change, in addition to its effects on sea-level rise and crop yields, may also affect society through the direct physiological impacts of heat stress on human health and labour productivity. In addition, the study cautioned that this have far reaching consequences especially for the poor student from poor households or schools where they do not afford air conditioning equipment (Heal and Park, 2016). This finding may be because of abnormal temperature experienced in Venda which in last summer they reached 40 degrees Celsius (UNIVEN Strategic Plan, 2015).

4.7.3. Sub- Theme: Challenges of life

The majority of students reported challenges of life such as sickness of family members, death of family member, unplanned pregnancy, and lack of sleep time as the major cause of stress.

“Ah I just heard that my parents are getting divorce, it is stressing me. I don’t understand why now after so many years, they been together more than 25 years why now? I don’t understand and it stresses me. i know my father can be problematic but I don’t know what push her to the edge” (Participant 20).

“Its stresses me that my parents are unemployed they rely in the farm to make end meet .when I think about the environment that the work under all the time it stresses me (Participant 21).

“Every day we are being bombarded by news of violent death, rape case even here on campus student are mugged by student thieves this stresses a lot (Participant 17).

This is in line with a study conducted by Van Breda, (2013) investigated the psychosocial vulnerability of 370 social work students at University of Johannesburg. The study concluded that the most prevalent life challenges experienced by students concerned death and poverty, which were reported by the majority of participants and which had significant negative impacts on

personal and academic well-being. Other prevalent challenges included substance abuse by family members, HIV or Aids in the family and being mugged or assaulted. According to Van Breda (2013) also found a clustering of challenges related to violence in intimate and family relationships. Death of a loved one and experiencing physical abuse were both related to number of courses failed, as was a composite vulnerability score. Hence, there is no doubt that students exposed to life challenges are stressed.

Similar to this is a study conducted by McGowan and Kagee, (2013) investigated the life-time exposure of 1 337 students at a residential university to a range of traumatic life events. The vast majority reported experiencing at least one of the traumas, with exposure to the suicide or homicide of a close friend or family member being most frequent. A fifth of the students indicated that the traumas occurred while they were a student. The study concluded that there was a significant positive relationship between the number of traumatic events and the level of post-traumatic stress symptoms. Lifetime event exposure can be difficult for community college students. In another study by Anders, Frazier, and Shallcross, (2012), the researchers compared stressful events in a sample of community college students and university students the study concluded that community college students reported experiencing almost all events (e.g. motor vehicle accident, stalked, threatened, etc.), which may contribute to anxiety, depression, and stress (Anders et al., 2012). In addition the study concluded that college students are more likely to have stress that experience potentially traumatic events or a variety of stressful events. Counseling and recognition of these experiences are essential (Anders et al., 2012).

4.8. Conclusion

Academic factors and personal factors were reported to stress students more. The study concludes that students' experiences stress due to personal problems, poor relationships with other students, parents, roommates, and lecturers. In addition stress among students is attributed to academic responsibilities and also environmental factors such as poor accommodation, academic facilities, life challenges and extreme heat. However, there is positive need to conduct further research to enrich knowledge base for the benefit of policy change and program design for university students stress interventions.

CHAPTER 5

SUMMARY, CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

5.1. INTRODUCTION

The aim of the study was to explore factors that contribute to stress by students at a selected University in South Africa. The research was undertaken in South Africa, at the University of Venda, which is designated as a previously disadvantaged or emerging university. This chapter outlines the summary, conclusions, and recommendations.

5.2 CONCLUSION

The following were the conclusion of this study:

- The study concluded that students felt stressed due to different factors that overwhelm them.
- Majority of the undergraduate students were stressed due to personal factors such as lack of finances to pay for school fees, accommodations and subsistence. Not having enough money for books, meals and other necessities is stressful to these students as they may be preoccupied with thoughts of how to get money, which negatively impacts on academic progress.
- In addition to lack of finance students experienced stress because they struggled to adapt to university life, poor time management skills and worrying about the future.
- Students also experienced stress due to poor relationship or conflicts with friends, family, lecturers, roommates and partners.
- All of the students were stressed due to their studies. Most student complained about high workload, fear of failure, failure to qualify for examinations and the examination format.
- The students revealed that inadequate resources such as poor accommodation, poor study facilities, heat and negotiating everyday life hassles stress contribute to their stress.

5.4. RECOMMENDATIONS

- The UNIVEN counseling unit should organize seminars and workshops on stress management techniques to undergraduate students at all levels to address financial and academic stress factors that impact on them.
- The UNIVEN facilities should maintain the residences and lecture halls which are in poor condition and install them with modern amenities such as air conditioners.
- The UNIVEN counseling unit should be categorically render counseling to undergraduates students on how to effectively manage their time in order to improve on their academic

achievement, resolve emotional problems and adjust effectively thereby develop their potential to improve on their academic achievement.

- The Department of Higher education training, local government, and provincial government should provide doable timetables and the university should pool resources to assist the students with scholarships to alleviate student financial stress.
- The Department of Health should priorities student mental health since it can lead to more serious health complications.

5.5. IINDICATION FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

According to the responses given by the participants in this study regarding the factors that contribute to stress among students. It is recommended that a broader research study using a quantitative cross sectional survey design, using a random sample be conducted in order to come up with ways that prohibit stress.

5.6. CONCLUSION

This chapter served as a summary in relation to the aim of the study which was to explore factors that contribute to stress among students at a selected university in South Africa. The study concludes that students' experiences stress due to a variety of factors such as personal problems, poor relationships, lack of resources and academic challenges. In addition the study suggested the recommendation and indications for further research.

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Annexure 1: Information letter

Dear Student

My name is Zamakhosi Zondi, a student in the Department of Public Health in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Venda. I am conducting a study on Factors contributing to stress among students at the selected university.

This study is purely academic and all information collected will be used for the purpose of this study and will not, in anyway, affect your relationship with other students or university management. The questionnaire will be interviewer-administered and it will take approximately 30 minutes of your time.

This is a voluntary participation and there is no penalty for refusing to participate. You can choose not to answer some questions or stop the interview at any time you feel like you do not want to continue with the interview.

Please sign the consent form to indicate your agreement to participate in this study.

You will receive a signed copy of this form to keep.

Thank you

Zamakhosi Zondi

Annexure 2: Permission letter

The Director (Student Affairs)

University of Venda

Private Bag X5050

0950 Thohoyandou

27 July 2017

RE: REQUEST FOR PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY

My name is Zamakhosi Zondi, a student in the Department of Public Health in the School of Health Sciences at the University of Venda. I wish to request for permission to conduct a study entitled “Factors contributing to stress among students at a selected university in South Africa”.

The study is purely academic and all information collected will be used for the purpose of this study and will not, in anyway, affect students relationship with other students or university management.

Hope you will find this in order and thank you for your favorable response.

Zamakhosi Zondi

Annexure 3: Interview guide

Central question: What are the factors that contribute to your stress as a student?

Follow up questions that may be asked depending on how they respond to main question

- What are the personal factors you consider to be the source of stress at your university?
- What are the environmental factors you consider to be the source of stress at your university?

Annexure 5: Audio Recording Consent

The interview will be audio recorded. A ninety minutes audio tape will be used. The recorded tape will be disposed after the interview has been transcribed and the information has been compiled into a report

Statement of Consent to be Audio-taped.

I understand that audio recordings will be taken during the study. (Mark either “Yes” or “No”

I agree to being audio recorded

Yes	
NO	

Name of Research Participant (please print)

Date

Signature of Participant

Time

