

**DAILY HASSLE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES: THE EXPERIENCE
OF PART-TIME ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION IN LESOTHO**

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by

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Research project submitted in partial fulfillment of the requirements for Master of Education in
Counseling and Human Services

Faculty of Education
Department of Educational Foundations
University of Botswana

2007/08

APPROVAL PAGE/CERTIFICATE OF APPROVAL

This research project has been examined and is approved as meeting the required standard of scholarship for partial fulfillment of the award for the degree of Master of Education in Counseling and Human Service.

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STATEMENT OF ORIGINALITY

This research project was submitted to the University of Botswana in partial fulfillment of the requirements for the award of Master of Education in Counseling and Human Services in May 2008.

It is the original work of the author which has neither been submitted to nor copied from any previous project in any other institution. All the material that has been used herein has been duly acknowledged.

Researcher's Signature: _____

Abstract

A study of the experiences that exposed part-time adult learners in higher education to daily hassle stress and the coping mechanisms that the learners adopted was carried out at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) of the National University of Lesotho (NUL). The goal of this applied qualitative study was to contribute knowledge on stress-related experiences of part-time adult learners in higher education so that the necessary interventions could be put in place. In-depth interviews of six part-time adult learners aged between 30 and over 50 years were conducted. The sample comprised three males and three females of different marital statuses, residing at different geographical locations of Lesotho. The experience of the participants in part-time learning ranged between five-and-a-half to seven-and-a-half years. Data was collected through semi-structured interview guide and the interviews were tape recorded. The data showed that the part-time adult learners at IEMS were constantly under time pressure to meet the social, economic, and academic demands. The learners were also burdened with financial responsibilities and obligations in meeting these demands. Furthermore, differences in personalities and negative attitudes of other students and some of the members of IEMS staff were stressful to the part-time adult learners. The part-time adult learners applied various coping strategies that rendered them resilient to the daily hassle stress. Social support, particularly from significant others, was identified as the most effective method of managing stress. Other coping strategies included emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and relaxation techniques. Medical help was viewed as the least effective coping strategy. The study suggested other measures to reduce stress could be explored by IEMS to help the part-time adult learners. The measures include minimization of the identified stressors within the learning environment, and the empowerment of the adult learners through the Western counseling approaches to supplement and complement the coping strategies that are already being used by the part-time adult learners.

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LIST OF ACRONYMS

Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development	-	IECCD
Institute of Extra-Mural Studies	-	IEMS
National University of Lesotho	-	NUL

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

First, I want to acknowledge with appreciation, the expertise and guidance of my two supervisors, Dr. Dan-Bush Bhusumane and Mrs. P. Tlhabiwe who demonstrated high levels of commitment and interest in my work throughout its stages. I further want to recognize the unwavering support that they gave me at a critical time of ill health which threatened my completion of this work. My profound gratitude also goes to Dr. G. N. Tsheko for creating time within her tight schedule to provide an invaluable feedback which enhanced the quality of my work.

I am greatly indebted to my former Supervisor, Dr. M. Onyewadume, for building a firm foundation to my study. I also want to appreciate the various forms of support that I received from my academic mentors, Dr. H M Lephoto, Dr. B L Morolong, and Dr. V M Mohasi. The support of Mr. D M Lephoto who provided an office for the interviews is also highly cherished.

This study would not have been possible without the invaluable input of the participants in this study. Their devotion which was demonstrated by their willingness to avail themselves for the interviews during the university recess is highly appreciated. In addition, I want to recognize the contribution of my employer (the National University of Lesotho) to my academic development, and the Government of Lesotho through its National Manpower Development Secretariat for the needed financial support.

My deepest sense of gratitude goes to my family, relatives, and friends, who supported me socially and emotionally as I faced the challenges of studying away from home. Those who deserve particular mention are my beloved sister, Masekhoane Moerane, my brothers, Letlafuoa Khechane and Chenche Moerane, as well as my very special friends Mantholelo Rakhomo, John Sekoere, and Malira Kooatsa.

Above all, I thank God Almighty for seeing me through this academic journey. May His Mighty name be praised and glorified now and always.

DEDICATION

This work is dedicated with love and gratitude to my husband - Ts'epo Mokenela who diligently wore the cap of both a father and a mother for the duration of my studies, not only to my children but also to me. I dedicate it also to my three teenagers, Lits'itso, Zondo, and Lingwane, who humbled me with their personal growth despite our minimal face-to-face contact over this extended period away from them.

Last but not least, I dedicate this work in memoriam to the most remarkable couple and founders of my being, my beloved parents, Gillespie and Pauline Khechane.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

Part-time adult learners in higher education are prone to daily hassle stress. Taylor, Peplau, and Sears (2006) have defined daily hassles as “minor stressful events or occurrences which may also have a cumulative and negative impact on health” (p. 451). According to DuBrin (2002), “managing everyday annoyances can have a greater impact on your health than major life catastrophes” (p. 114). Part-time adult learners perform various social and economic roles (Fasokun, Katahoire, & Oduaran, 2005) over and above the roles associated with college life which is perceived to be “filled with many stressful events” (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears 2006, p. 459). The challenge to keep up with the dynamic social, economic, and academic environment is likely to expose the part-time adult learners to increased daily hassles thereby generating stress and stress-related illnesses.

According to Hobfoll (1998), we are in the age of stress. Moholwana-Sangqu (2007) has also professed that today society is faced with an increasingly pressured environment and that various degrees of stress affect us all. Stress can be defined as a “substantial imbalance between environmental demand and the response capability of the focal organism” (McGarth cited in Hobfoll, 1998, p.8). DuBrin (2002) has described stress as “an internal reaction to any force that threatens to disturb a person’s equilibrium. The internal reaction usually takes the form of emotional discomfort” (p.108). It can, therefore, be inferred that stress is a reaction or response triggered by individual appraisals of their capability to balance the demand and response to a situation.

Kosbab (1989) maintained that distress could best describe what substantial numbers of adult learners experienced when returning to school considering that they were largely working and struggling to balance jobs, families, and education. The responsibility and challenge for part-time adult learners in higher education to perform various social, economic, and academic roles was

likely to expose them to feelings associated with stress. Such feelings could include feelings of frustration, desperation, helplessness, anxiety, and anger. Seemingly, a majority of part-time adult learners continue to study and complete their study programs despite the possibility of increased daily hassles and related stress. It could, therefore, be presumed from the foregoing that there could be effective ways adopted by the part-time adult learners to cope with stress related to the social, economic, and academic demands. Taylor et al. (2006) have suggested that stress management techniques can help in controlling adverse reactions to stressful events. This study seeks to determine the daily hassle stress experienced by part-time adult learners in higher education, the stress management techniques that they adopt, and the effectiveness of such strategies.

Background to the Study

Lesotho is a country situated in Southern Africa and entirely landlocked by the Republic of South Africa. In 1999 it was one of the developing countries with 49% of the population living below poverty datum line (CIA World Factbook, 2007). Education in Lesotho is viewed as one of the strategies to reduce poverty and unavailability of skilled workers. As Tsekoa (2005) suggested, “the envisaged economic development for Lesotho is dependent on the availability of highly skilled manpower” (p. 2). This statement underscores the value of education on the economic development of the country. The education system in Lesotho, being a country that was formerly colonized by the British until 1966, is predominantly the formal education of the western type which, according to Adeyinka (2006), “emphasizes literary and academic work as a model of education for Africa” (p. 22). However, according to the Lesotho Ministry of Education (2005), education in Lesotho includes both formal and non-formal education. The formal education covers Integrated Early Childhood Care and Development (IECCD), primary, junior secondary, senior secondary, and tertiary/higher education.

Learners in the formal education system at times drop out of the system for various reasons like poor academic performance, financial issues, ill health, teenage pregnancy, early marriage, and other forms of social problems that they might be confronted with. Later in their adulthood stages, these dropouts realize the need to continue with their education in order for them to meet social and economic demands. As Mushi and Nyirenda (1997) put it, “to perform adult roles competently in the midst of rapid social change requires that a person study his [sic] way through adulthood” (p. 73). It is in this context that the learners who dropped out of the formal education system later enroll as part-time adult learners in institutions of higher learning.

The National University of Lesotho (NUL), the only university in Lesotho, through its Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) offers part-time programs in various academic disciplines for adult learners who wish to enhance their social, economic, and academic status. One such program is the four-year Bachelor of Education (B.Ed) Adult Education program offered on a partial distance education mode. The program uses two modes of operation, namely, face-to-face residential short courses lasting for a week in each semester, and monthly meetings of two days on one weekend.

Students in the adult education program are expected to “aggressively engage in constant private studies on the distance education mode using course material specially produced for all the courses offered ...” (*Student Book for Degree Courses, n.d. p. 5*). The constant private study includes search for study-related material which could involve visits to libraries and the use of technology, such as, the internet. According to Pretorius (n.d.) the internet is “here to stay and it is going to play a major role in future in education, learning and research” (p. 322).

The partial distance education mode used at IEMS implies that the part-time adult learners, who are mainly working adults charged with social roles and responsibilities, attend classes, study individually or in groups, go to libraries in search of material, and travel between home, work, and

school almost on a daily basis. The task of carrying out all these activities could lead to increased daily hassles that were likely to generate stress.

Statement of the Problem

The Part-time adult learners have the challenge to balance social, economic and academic demands on a daily basis. This situation could lead to increased daily hassles which could best be described as the totality of activities carried out by adults on a daily basis. The daily hassles could range from household chores, job-related tasks, study-related tasks, parenting roles, assistance given to children in their studies, travel to and from work, to mention but a few. This multiplicity of roles performed by the part-time adult learners could render them susceptible to feelings such as concerns over future security, time pressure, work pressures, household problems, concerns over oneself, and financial responsibility. These concerns were identified by McDowell (2000) as possible stressors that were viewed as minor yet they could also lead to the development of stress.

This study was prompted by my past experiences as a part-time learner in the adult education program at NUL for a period of six years. I found the program to be very demanding and challenging considering that there were also social and economic demands to be met. Upon completion of studies I was employed as a Teaching Assistant and a Coordinator of the Diploma in Adult Education program of NUL. During the two and a half years in which I served in these teaching and administrative capacities, and interacted with part-time adult learners on a daily basis, the learners presented me with situations that I perceived as stressful. I, therefore, developed an interest to further explore the experiences of part-time adult learners in higher education and to identify their ways of coping with possible stress that they could be encountering.

Review of related literature indicated that not much research had been done in relation to the coping strategies that part-time adult learners employed in dealing with stress caused by daily hassles. However, Östlund (2005) carried out a similar study in terms of the characteristics of

learners, the learning environment, and mode of program delivery. The study by Östlund focused on describing, analyzing, and understanding the experiences of adult distance learners in terms of obstacles and opportunities that influence their studying and learning.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study was to find out the daily hassle stress which part-time adult learners in higher education were experiencing, how they coped with daily hassles, and also to determine the effectiveness of such coping strategies.

Research Questions

- 1) What is the nature and scope of daily hassle stress experienced by part-time adult learners in higher education at IEMS?
- 2) What feelings do part-time adult learners in higher education experience in performing social, economic, and academic roles?
- 3) How do part-time adult learners in higher education appraise their experiences in relation to stress?
- 4) What coping strategies do the part-time adult learners in higher education employ in order to manage stress?
- 5) How effective are the stress coping strategies adopted by the part-time learners in higher education?

Significance of the Study

Not much research has been done on this topic. The study will, therefore, contribute to knowledge on possible stress-related experiences that part-time adult learners in higher education could be exposed to. It will further contribute to knowledge on coping mechanisms employed by the learners in the adult education degree program offered by NUL and also determine whether or not such strategies are effective. Furthermore, the study will be beneficial to policy makers and

implementers in institutions of higher learning that run partial or full distance education programs, to adult learners in both part-time and full-time programs, as well as to the theory and practice of counseling.

Policy Makers and Implementers

Policies and decisions have to be based on factual information in order for them to be beneficial to all stakeholders. The findings of the study will contribute knowledge about the experiences of adult learners in Lesotho as well as identify the strategies that help learners to cope with their demanding situation. This may inform policy and decisions on adult learning in similar contexts such that possible issues and challenges facing adult learners are better understood, considered and accommodated in developing adult learning policies as well as learner support programs.

Part-time and Full-time Adult Learners

The findings of the study may sensitize potential part-time and full-time adult learners, and those who are already enrolled in programs, to the possible stressors and ways of coping with daily hassle stress. Such awareness is likely to facilitate informed choice and decisions by the potential adult learners regarding their capability and preparedness to enroll in such programs.

Theory and Practice of Counseling

The study will inform the practice of counseling in higher educational settings, particularly in programs that are offered on a part-time basis where counseling is perceived as a valuable learner support service. In addition, the findings of the study will raise awareness of counselors to stress-related issues in higher education that require counseling intervention.

Delimitations and Scope of the Study

The study covered part-time adult learners in the Bachelor of Education (Adult Education) program offered by NUL. Learners in this program must have completed a two-year diploma in

adult education prior to admission into the degree program. This implies that the learners have at least two years experience in part-time learning. The part-time adult learners are predominantly working adults from almost all ten (10) districts of Lesotho. The study focused on stress generated by daily hassles and the coping mechanisms used by the learners.

Definition of Terms

Effective coping strategies: any efforts made by the part-time adult learners to manage stressful situations which have helped them to continue to function meaningfully within their social, economic, and academic environments.

Full distance education: a mode of learning in which learners and lecturers are separated in space and time. The mode predominantly uses electronic and printed material with minimal or no face to face contact.

Partial distance education: a mode of education delivery which combines the use of electronic and print media as well as face-to-face meetings with lecturers or facilitators, and group discussions amongst the students.

Part-time adult learner: an individual enrolled in the Bachelor of Education (Adult Education) degree offered on a part-time basis by NUL.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

This chapter aims to review related literature to the study. Not much research has been done on the study area. The purpose of the literature review was, therefore, mainly to enhance understanding and insights necessary to develop a logical framework for the topic. The chapter covered a general overview of stress and adult learning. Specific aspects of the literature review that were viewed from a broader perspective and presented in subtopics include the nature of stress, nature of daily hassles stress, perceptions on adult learners in higher education, adult learning programs, and stress coping strategies.

The Nature of Stress

McGarth cited in Hobfoll (1998) defined stress as a “substantial imbalance between environmental demand and the response capability of the focal organism” (p. 8). This definition depicts stress as a product of the appraisal of a situation with emphasis on one’s perception on the ability or inability to cope with the demand. Milner and Palmer’s (1998) Integrative-Transactional model of stress and coping has portrayed development of stress and coping as a process that involved five stages. Stage 1 occurs when a potential external pressure or demand is recognized by a client. Stage 2 involves appraisal of the client’s situation which will lead to Stage 3 in which stress is triggered if the situation is appraised as threatening. Stage 4 involves assessment of the effect of one’s responses during Stage 3. At this reappraisal stage the stress response can either be switched off or re-triggered. The last stage, that is, Stage 5, is more concerned with the effect of the person’s actions upon the pressures. The model, therefore, suggests that stress is relative and dependant on how individuals appraise and respond to their situations. Furthermore, the individual appraisals are viewed as central to subsequent efforts to manage the stressful situation (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006).

Milner and Palmer (1998) further purported that the imbalance between the demands of a particular situation and one's current ability to cope is more frequently seen when normal coping resources are over-stretched. Stressful situations, therefore, become a problem when we perceive that our current ability to cope is not adequate to meet the demands of the situation. Part-time adult learners in higher education have the challenge to balance social, economic, and academic demands. In this context, they are prone to situations that require them to make appraisals of their internal and external resources which could lead to stress in cases where they perceive their resources as either inadequate or overstretched.

Stress in itself is not necessarily negative. What is said to be negative is the "emotional experience" that one encounters when responding to a particular situation. As Seyle (2006) put it, "stress is not the nonspecific result of damage only. Normal and even pleasant activities – a game of tennis or a passionate kiss- can produce considerable stress without causing conspicuous damage" (p. 1). Stress can thus be categorized into positive and negative stress. The four main types of stress are eustress, distress, hyperstress, and hypostress (*The National Center for Health and Wellness, 2002-2006*). The eustress is described as positive and arising when motivation and inspiration are needed; distress can be brought about by constant readjustments or alterations in a routine; hyperstress occurs when an individual is pushed beyond what he or she can handle; and hypostress occurs when an individual is bored or unchallenged. Notwithstanding that stress that enhances function may be considered as good, if stress persists and is of excessive degree, it eventually leads to anxious or depressive behaviour (*Stress [Medicine]*, para. 3).

The nature of adult learning requires motivation and inspiration to learn, as well as adaptation to the learning environment. Adult learning, therefore, comes with added responsibility which is likely to expose the learners to eustress, distress, and hyperstress. For example, the anxiety of the learners to do well in their studies can lead to the development of eustress. However, at times

eustress could rise to excessive levels that render it negative. It is, therefore, possible that adult learners in higher education experience at least one of the four main types of stress discussed above.

Stress response has been explained as the presence of disparity between experience and personal expectations (*Stress [Medicine]*, para. 3). In this regard, a stress response can be said to be relative. For example, rural people living in comparative poverty may not be stressed if, according to their expectations, what they have is sufficient. This brings in culture as an important aspect in investigations that involve individual perceptions and appraisals. According to Taylor, Peplau, and Sears (2006) psychologists have also come to recognize the importance of the culture, that is, the norms, shared beliefs, values, traditions, and behavior patterns in a particular socio-cultural context. This recognition underscores the influence of a person's experiences and expectations on individual appraisals. What an outsider might interpret as stressful might not be perceived as stressful by the person concerned. Based on the foregoing, contrary to my perception that adult learners in higher education are prone to stress, the learners might not appraise their situation as stressful given their cultural expectations and experiences.

The Nature of Daily Hassle Stress

Daily hassles are defined as minor stressful events or occurrences which may also have a cumulative and negative impact on health (Taylor, Peplau, & Sears, 2006). According to Smith (2006), a number of smaller events overload the adaptive system of the body, which causes high levels of stress yet "many people may not be aware that they are undergoing stress" (p. 1). Lazarus and Folkman cited in McDowell (n.d.) have hypothesized that "small stressors are more common, and chronic low-level stressors may play a more significant role in the development of pathology" (p. 1). The hypothesis was a reaction against the inclusion of major life events as causes of illness and disease.

Lazarus and Folkman argued that not only major life events can lead to the development of stress but also stressors that are sometimes viewed as minor. The relative importance of daily hassles versus major life events, specific disorders, or major surgery was that the latter were infrequent occurrences in the experience of the individual whereas general day-to-day healthiness (or unhealthiness) was a chronic source of distress (Cassidy, 2000). Gay (2007) has also argued that people emphasize the major life events but daily stressors are an important factor as well. The effects of daily hassles on health can, therefore, not be overlooked.

Taylor, Peplau, and Sears (2006) have stated that researchers are increasingly recognizing the importance of chronic stress in health generated by stressful day-to-day occurrences or experiences like living in a noisy, crowded, crime-filled environment. Such occurrences are said to have cumulative adverse effects on health. Experience of feelings such as concerns over the future security, time pressure, work pressures, household problems, concerns over oneself, financial responsibility, and environmental problems have also been identified as components of hassle scale (McDowell, 2000). Harper, Schaalje, and Sandberg (2000) in their investigation of the relationship between daily stress, intimacy, and marital quality in mature marriages also concluded that daily stress was negatively related to marital quality of both wives and husbands. All these assertions by different authors indicate the significance of the negative effects of daily hassles on stress that are inherent in various aspects related to adulthood life.

Perceptions on Adult Learners in Higher Education

The 2002 National Center for Education Statistics report, as cited by Thomas (2005) has suggested that “adult learners are often part-time students; are financially independent of their parents; are employed full time; and have dependants of their own” (para. 3). Fasokun, Katahoire, and Oduaran (2005) supported this perception, stating that an adult “has to be a productive person, contributing in some way to the economic and social standard of living of the family or

community”. (p. 18). In line with the described characteristics of part-time adult learners, Stokes (n.d.) maintained that “the vast majority of college and university students are ‘non-traditional’ – largely working adults struggling to balance jobs, families, and education” (para. 1). The 2002 National Center for Education Statistics report estimated that more than 47 percent of enrollees in the U.S. higher education institutions could be classified as adult learners (Thomas, 2005). In this context, it could be inferred that a substantial number of learners in higher education fell within the category of the adult population that was faced with the challenge to perform multiple roles attached to adulthood along with academic roles. The multiplicity of roles was likely to result in increased daily hassles that could generate stress. Kosbab (1989) built on this scenario in identifying stress felt by older students in higher education as one of the issues that should be addressed by educators and members of the helping professions.

A study of the experiences of adult learners in distance education at the Umeå University in Sweden, carried out by Östlund (2005) has identified pressure due to insufficient time and disruptions during their studies as some of the stressors. The study further identified three main areas which negatively affected studies as circumstances in the domestic lives of adult learners, circumstances in their work lives, and lack of experience with studying on a distance education mode. These areas can be viewed as stressors to adult learners in higher education which call for adjustment and adaptation in order to cope with the learning settings.

Generally, Taylor, Peplau, and Sears (2006) have asserted that college life was “filled with many stressful events” (p. 459). Kosbab (1989) supported this view in stating that researchers have found graduate students to be particularly vulnerable to emotional maladies such as loneliness, severe anxiety, role confusion, and alienation. In addition, Askham (2008) carried out a study at the University of Sheffield in the United Kingdom (UK) to explore the experience of a cohort of part-time, work-based learners, mostly experiencing higher education for the first time. The findings of

the study suggested that particular feelings were induced by anxieties, such as lack of academic skills and abstractions, as well as a sense of vulnerability. Such anxieties had an impact upon the students' emotional experience and state of mind throughout the learning process. Askham further concluded that "work-based mature students enter higher education with a readily constructed identity based on their work role but this may be in conflict with the new student identity" (p. 89). Based on the foregoing constructs, it could be argued that the academic environment of adult learners predisposed the learners to stress that could negatively affect learning.

The cited studies by Östlund and Askham did not go further to explore the stress and coping strategies that adult learners adopted in order to manage their situation, as well as the effectiveness of such strategies. This is one area that the proposed study sets out to explore. Östlund's study again made use of weekly diaries to collect data from the respondents. The method of data collection in this study differed from that of Östlund in that in-depth interviews were the main data collection method.

Billington (1996) suggested ways to counteract barriers to effective learning. She perceived that adults grew more where there was interaction and dialogue between students and instructors, students tried out new ideas in the workplace, and exercises and experiences were used to bolster facts and theory. Billington has further advocated for environments that are conducive to learning in order to maximize effective adult learning. These include environments where students feel safe and supported, and environments where faculty treats adult students as peers - accepted and respected as intelligent experienced adults whose opinions are listened to, honored, and appreciated.

According to Mushi and Nyirenda (1997), "adult learners tend to participate in programmes which focus on real life problems in which they have adequate knowledge. They have problems and challenges which they wish to solve now and not tomorrow" (p. 13). Adult learners, therefore, learn for a specific purpose to address their felt needs. However, owing to the multiplicity of roles that

they are socially expected to perform, the adult learners can no longer continue to learn on a full-time basis. It is against this background that the adults enroll in learning programs that are run on full or partial distance education modes in order to accommodate the societal expectations as well as address their felt learning needs concurrently. In so doing, the daily activities carried out by the part-time adult learners are likely to be higher in number than those of adults who are not engaged in learning.

Adult Learning Programs

Thomas (2005) has purported that “all too often, adult learning programs are marginalized, neglected and ultimately left out of a college or university’s mission” (para.1). He further observed that despite the marginalized treatment, enrollment numbers have increased significantly. However, he observed that most institutions and their faculty were ill equipped to address the diverse needs of their adult students. The foregoing views denote the value of adult learning programs in institutions of higher learning despite the possible marginalization of such programs.

Adult learning programs were mainly offered on either partial or full distance education mode in order to accommodate the multiple roles played by the learners. Keegan cited in Wheeler (2004) has offered 5 characteristics which defined distance education. These include separation of teacher and learner, influence of educational organization, use of technical media, provision of 2-way communication, and absence of the learner group. However, in the case of partial distance education programs learner groups can be used.

Wheeler went further to describe that Keegan’s interest entailed defining, amongst others, the implication that the learners in distance education will spend the majority of their time studying in isolation, as well as the emphasis on the importance of selecting good media and technology to promote teacher and student communication. It could, therefore, be concluded that the teaching

methods used in part-time adult learning programs should ideally involve the use of technical media and learner groups to make up for the isolation of the part-time adult learners.

Use of Technology in Adult Learning Programs

Billington (1996) has suggested the need for adults to keep abreast of technological developments, arguing that

with our ever-accelerating speed of change in both knowledge and technology, it is clear that we adults have a choice: We either continue to learn throughout our lives, or we allow our skills and knowledge to quickly slide into obsolescence (para. 1)

In this manner, the importance of technology in adult learning cannot be overemphasized. This view was supported by Pretorius (n.d.) who alleged that “the Net can be regarded as a completely ‘new’ way of learning and studying” (p. 311). He further cited Ellsworth who maintained that “as soon as the students realize that their rewards on the Net will be in proportion to their investment in learning Net skills, they will want to learn more of it” (p. 311). These perceptions on the use of technology in adult learning underscore the importance of information technology as a learner support structure in higher education.

Learning Groups in Adult Learning Programs

Rogers (2002) maintained that the “majority of the planned learning opportunities for adults are still undertaken in some form of group” (p.167). He further asserted that most adult students seem to prefer groups as a context for learning, and that the learning group can often achieve more for its members than on a one-to-one situation, which is as a sound educational advantage.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, Rogers cautioned that the teacher of adults needs to balance the usefulness of the group against the growth of individuation which can equally be inhibited by group learning. While the worth of groups in adult learning programs cannot be overemphasized, it is equally important for educators and facilitators to avoid over-usage of groups which could promote

group dependence amongst the learners and even be detrimental to individual growth of the learners.

Stress Coping Strategies

Strategies for Managing Stress

Coping can be defined as “the efforts to control, reduce, or learn to tolerate the threats that lead to stress” (Feldman, 1989, p. 425). It was again defined as “the process of attempting to manage demands that are viewed as taxing or exceeding our resources” (Lazarus & Folkman cited in Taylor, Peplau, and Sears, 2006, p. 452). The two definitions quoted above imply that coping is a process aimed at managing stressful situations by exercising control, management, and tolerance of threats, as well as challenges and demands that are viewed as exceeding one’s resources.

Coping, however, should not only be seen as complete success in solving an issue, but it can be measured in terms of one’s ability to function. As Hobfoll (1998) put it “although we should not presuppose that coping is only coping if it proves successful, we should nevertheless expect that efforts to ameliorate stress’s negative impact should generally lower psychological distress, improve or protect health, and enhance functioning” (p. 127). This study, therefore, looked into the efforts made by adult learners to reduce stress and enhance their functioning irrespective of whether such efforts proved successful or not.

According to Feldman (1989), researchers at the University of California at Berkeley have discovered that there are several ways in which people cope with stress. “In one part of the study, the researchers found that coping was associated with seeking out the social support of others (Dunkel-Schetter, Folkman, & Lazarus in Feldman, 1989). Social support may be provided in several ways, like emotional concern expressed through liking, love, or empathy; instrumental aid [provision of goods or services]; provision of information about a stressful situation; provision of information that is relevant to self-appraisal (Taylor et al., 2006). In addition, a longitudinal study

carried out in Scotland and Northern Ireland by Field and Schuller cited in Askham (2008) has confirmed “the importance of family, friends and work colleagues, who then become perceived as stakeholders adding further to the pressure not to fail” (p. 95).

Askham (2008) further cited Gallacher et al in his study of the support needs of students in further education which acknowledged the “importance of friends and peers and a general tendency to seek support from one’s social milieu rather than from within the ‘alien culture’ of higher education” (p. 95). The foregoing coping strategies are applicable to the African context given the traditionally close-knit family pattern. Indigenous counseling in Africa, Lesotho included, was also more about social support in that it provided information and advice to enhance coping ability of individuals. It is, therefore, likely that adult learners in Lesotho make use of such strategies.

Another experiment that formed part of the large-scale field study carried out by researchers at the University of California at Berkeley showed that people used two major sorts of techniques for dealing with stress, namely, emotion-focused coping, and problem-focused coping. Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, and Danoff-Burg in Taylor et al (2006) stated that emotion-focused coping involved efforts to regulate or work through one’s emotional reactions to the stressful event. The problem-focused efforts are described as an attempt to do something constructive to change the stressful circumstances. According to Taylor et al (2006) these two types of coping can occur simultaneously. The possibility of the use of the two stress management strategies amongst the part-time adult learners in Lesotho will be explored.

DuBrin (2002) maintained that “the experience of stress helps activate hormones that prepare the body to fight or run when faced with a challenge. This battle against the stressor is referred to as the fight-or-flight response” (p. 108). This implies that when individuals experience stressful situations, they make a choice to either confront it or run away.

Gender Differences in Coping with Stress

DuBrin (2002) has further asserted that recent studies have suggested the possibility that men and women react differently to stress. He postulated that:

women, along with females of other species, react differently to major stressors.

Instead of the fight-or-flight response typical of males, they *tend and befriend*.

When stress levels mount, women are more likely to protect and nurture their children (tend) and turn to social networks of supportive females (befriend) (p.108).

The foregoing statement insinuates that there could be differences in the manner in which males and females respond to stress.

Relaxation Techniques Used in Coping with Stress

Smith (2006) identified the relaxation response as another way to cope with stress. The response is viewed as an opposite reaction that could counteract negative effects. Techniques used in this coping strategy include yoga, meditation, progressive relaxation, physical exercise, dancing, massage, and listening to soothing music. The relaxation response might also be a foreign idea to Basotho adult learners as it is more inclined towards the Western culture. However, the Western influence can be seen in a number of practices and behaviors in Africa. Consequently, there is a possibility that some of the adult learners are exposed to these coping strategies.

Summary

The literature review explored the nature of stress which was defined as a negative emotional response to situations perceived as challenging, demanding, or threatening by an individual. In addition, the literature described daily hassles as low-level stressors occurring on a daily basis that can lead to stress. The perceptions on adult learners by various authors as well as experiences of adult learners in higher education based on empirical studies were examined. Generally, the adult learners were perceived as largely working adults struggling to balance jobs,

families, and education. The literature review further provided information on adult learning programs and the approaches that were used in partial or full distance education learning mode. Information Technology (IT) and learning groups were perceived by a number of authors as suitable for adult learning programs. Stress coping strategies were also discussed under three sections, namely, strategies for managing stress, gender differences in coping with stress, and relaxation techniques. Other mechanisms suggested for coping with stress included social support, emotion-focused coping, and problem-focused coping.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This chapter describes the research design that will be used in the study, the setting of the study, population sample, research instruments, pilot testing of instruments, data collection procedures, data analysis procedures, and reporting of results.

Design of the Study

An applied qualitative research approach was adopted in this study. According to Patton (2002), the purpose of applied research is “to contribute knowledge that will help people understand the nature of a problem in order to intervene, thereby allowing human beings to more effectively control their environment” (p. 217). The approach is, therefore, relevant for purposes of this study that is intended to contribute knowledge to enhance understanding of the nature and effect of daily-hassle stress on part-time adult learners in higher education, and the coping mechanisms adopted by the part-time learners. Such knowledge could facilitate the identification of areas that necessitated intervention by various stakeholders.

Chilisa and Preece (2005) have described qualitative research as a type of inquiry in which the researcher carries out a study of people’s experiences in natural settings. Qualitative methods are again designed to provide an in-depth description of a specific program, practice, or setting (Mertens, 2005). The qualitative nature of the applied research makes the approach suitable for this study because the study sets out to illicit in-depth descriptions of stress-related experiences of adult learners and their perspectives on related events, beliefs, or practices. Gay and Peter (2003) have asserted that qualitative methods are also useful for exploring complex research areas about which little is known. In this regard, the qualitative approach will be appropriate in exploring the intended research area given that not much research has been done on it.

Setting of the Study

The study was conducted at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) of the National University of Lesotho (NUL). IEMS as the extension arm of the university reaches out to the wider population from all the districts of Lesotho through part-time programs. The programs range from diploma to masters level in academic disciplines like adult education, business management, and mass communication. The physical structure of IEMS comprises office buildings, classrooms, two halls, a library, media centre, parking space for staff and students, and sports grounds. There is no accommodation facility for students in this setting because the campus mainly serves working adults enrolled on a part-time basis. The focus of the study was on the Bachelor of Education in Adult Education hence forth referred to as B.Ed. (Adult Education).

The B.Ed. (Adult Education) program is run on a partial distance education mode comprising face-to-face sessions, library work, group work, and individual study. In this context, in a semester the part-time adult learners have face-to-face contact with lecturers for one full week, followed by weekend meetings of two days which are held once a month for a period of four months. In between the weekend classes, part-time learners study on their own, consult libraries, and work on assignments given to them either in groups or individually in preparation for the next class. The part-time adult learners at times organize group discussions on their own initiative to support each other in their learning activities. The setting of the study is familiar to me given that I was formerly a student in the part-time adult education program for a period of six years and later served as a teaching assistant in the same program for a period of two-and-a-half (2 ½) years.

Population and Sample

The population of the study was part-time adult learners in the B.Ed. (Adult Education) program enrolled in 2007/08 academic year. The total enrolment for the 2007/08 academic year spread across all the four years of the program was 192. The part-time adult learners were

predominantly adults who performed social, economic, and academic roles concurrently. Their minimum adult learning experience was five-and-a-half years, depending on the level at which they started, that is , certificate or diploma, prior to their entry into the degree program. It can, therefore, be inferred that at this level the part-time adult learners were rich sources of data based on their experience of part-time learning in higher education.

In addition, the part-time adult learners at IEMS represented part-time learners from different geographical settings in Lesotho. My assumption was that the situation and issues of part-time adult learners in rural and urban areas of the country were likely to differ, hence the significance of the representation of learners from both settings.

A sample of 6 out of 29 participants was drawn from the students in the third year of study in B.Ed. (Adult Education). The selection was based on the supposition that learners at this level of study were likely to have rich information given their five-and-a-half years' minimum experience in part-time adult learning, coupled with the fact that they had continued to study up to that level. According to Patton (2002) "qualitative inquiry typically focuses in depth on relatively small samples, even single cases (N=1), selected purposefully" (p. 230). Gay and Peter (2003) also asserted that in qualitative studies "there are no hard and fast numbers that represent the 'correct' number of participants" (p.195). They have further explained that the number of participants engaged in a research sample is influenced by factors like the qualitative researcher's time, money, participant availability, participant interest, amongst others.

In this study, the sample size was mainly influenced by the time-frame of the study, the availability of the participants considering that the data was collected during the Christmas recess when the students were not on campus, and my intention to include both male and female participants. In selecting the sample for the study, the geographical location, marital status, and gender of the participants were factored in.

The sample of six (6) part-time adult learners who participated in this study comprised five (5) participants who were married with children and one single parent. Despite the fact that “more women than men are enrolled as students in the University” (*The Lesotho Ministry of Education, 2005, p.81*), efforts to have an equal representation of both male and female participants in this study were successful. The gender imbalance was evidenced by the fact that out of a total of 29 participants, 86% (25) were females. The purpose of categorizing participants according to their marital status and gender was to determine whether or not the roles and responsibilities attached to marital status and gender had any effect on the level of stress experienced by the adult learners.

Sampling Procedure

The study set out to employ criterion sampling, which is one of the purposive sampling strategies. However, the procedure was used along with snowball sampling whereby the participants were asked to identify another information-rich case that fitted the criterion. Patton (2002) has acknowledged that purposeful sampling approaches “are not mutually exclusive. Each approach serves a somewhat different purpose. Because research and evaluation often serve multiple purposes, more than one qualitative sampling strategy may be necessary” (p. 242). The logic of criterion sampling as explained by Patton is “to review and study all cases that meet some predetermined criterion of importance,” (p. 238). The sampling procedures, therefore, involved a review of all cases that exhibited certain predetermined characteristics and picking cases that meet the criterion. In this study, the criterion in selecting critical cases included the year of study (that is, third year), marital status (single and without children, single parents, or married with children), geographical location (rural or urban), and gender.

Snowball or chain sampling was used in identifying critical cases through asking people who knew key informants. According to Patton (2002) the process begins by asking well-situated people: ‘who knows a lot about _____? Whom should I talk to?’” (p. 237). A combination of criterion

and snowball sampling procedures was, therefore, used to draw the required sample of six (6) participants.

The purposive nature of the criterion sampling procedure enhanced the quality of the study in that it allowed for selection of sample based on experience, knowledge, and judgment on how thoughtful, informative, articulate, and experienced the participants could be regarding the research topic and setting (Gay & Peter, 2003). In this context, my prior knowledge and experience of part-time adult learning at IEMS influenced the criterion for my sample.

Research Instruments

An interview guide consisting of a set of six open-ended questions (see Appendix A) was constructed for the semi-structured individual interviews. Chilisa and Preece (2005) have intimated that semi-structured interviews involved the use of interview guides to ensure that the researcher collects similar types of data from all respondents. Patton (2002), on the other hand, has asserted that “the general interview guide approach involves outlining a set of issues that are to be explored with each respondent before interviewing begins” (p. 342). In view of this statement, an interview guide was used for purposes of consistency and guidance in exploring relevant issues to the study.

An advantage of a semi-structured interview guide as identified by Chilisa and Preece (2005) was that the sequencing of questions need not necessarily be the same for every participant. In this regard, I had the freedom to “build conversation within a particular subject area, to word questions spontaneously, and to establish a conversation style but with focus on a particular subject that has been predetermined” (Patton, 2002, p. 343). The interview guide was, therefore, appropriate for this study as it helped me to maintain consistency, focus, and flexibility in the probing of participants’ responses, exploration of unplanned topics, and clarification of responses whenever the need arose.

Notwithstanding the foregoing, direct interviewer-interviewee contact has a disadvantage in that the responses of participants “may be biased and affected by her or his reaction to the interviewer, especially if there is not a long-time relationship with the interviewer” (Gay & Peter, 2003, p. 291). In order to minimize such biases, the participants were encouraged to be genuine and free to express their views and opinions without fear of being judged. I also assured them that the situation of each and every individual was unique and, as a result, there were no right or wrong answers to the questions asked.

Data Collection Procedure

A letter was written to the head of the adult education department (see Appendix B) seeking permission to carry out the study. I personally delivered the letter, and in the process, I was referred to the program coordinator with whom we had a discussion regarding the group from which I could select a sample. Based on the discussion, I decided to draw a sample from the third (Year III) students in B.Ed. (Adult Education) as opposed to the fourth (Year IV) students who were considered to be busy with their own research projects at the time. The Deputy Director of IEMS offered me a suitable space within the Institute that could be used to interview the part-time adult learners. Since the university was on Christmas recess, the program coordinator mentioned that one of the students from the identified sample was on campus at the time. I met the student, explained my study to her along with the sampling criterion. The student matched the sample criterion and, as a result, I sought and obtained her permission to participate in the study.

An appointment for the interview was set, and the student was then asked to suggest a name or names and also to provide contact details of other information-rich cases that fitted the criterion. I called potential respondents on their telephones which were either mobile or landline and requested them to participate in the study. I also requested them to identify other key informants. Suitable times and venue for the interviews were established and the individual appointments were made.

Two of the participants were interviewed at their place of work, while the other four were able to come to IEMS for the interviews.

Prior to the interview, all the selected information-rich cases or participants were informed about the intended study, its purpose, significance, as well as the relevance and perceived benefits of the study for them. Participants were assured of confidentiality and anonymity, and explanations of how this would be achieved were made. These were to be achieved through the use of codes assigned to participants instead of names, and the safekeeping of data which I would personally transcribe and handle up to the stage where I would destroy the tapes at the end of the study. A letter requesting the selected cases to participate in the study (see Appendix C) was given to each participant, and a written consent form (see Appendix D) was signed by both the researcher and the participants. Biographical data was collected from the participants just before the interview using the forms that had been designed for the purpose (see Appendix E). At the beginning of the interviews, the participants were informed of their freedom to respond either in Sesotho or English, depending of their preference of medium of communication.

Individual interviews of about 1 to 1 ½ hours were conducted at the times agreed upon with the respondents. Permission of the participants to tape-record the interviews was sought and obtained, and this formed part of the written consent that was signed. In addition, notes were taken during the interviews, and diary notes were also made throughout the data collection process.

Validity, Reliability, and Credibility of the Instruments

The semi-structured interview guide was tested for validity and reliability. Guba and Lincoln cited in Mertens (2005) have asserted that in qualitative research dependability is identified as parallel to reliability. The two concepts, reliability and validity, as observed by Gay and Peter (2003), are important aspects for judging the suitability of measuring instruments. Validity is concerned with appropriateness while reliability tells us about consistency of scores produced. For

purposes of face and content validity, one part-time lecturer in adult education and full-time lecturer who were both professionals knowledgeable in the area of study and also familiar with the study setting were requested to review the instrument. The instrument was further tested for reliability on two (2) students in the third year of their studies. I did individual interviews of the two students using the semi-structured interview guide. Then I listened to the tapes and took notes in order to check for consistency in the manner in which I asked the questions and the responses that I got from the interviewees. The instrument was edited and revised based on the outcome of the pilot test. The data collected from the two students was not included in the data analysis.

Credibility was another important aspect as it helped to establish whether or not there was correspondence between the way respondents actually perceived social constructs and the way the researchers portrayed their view points (Mertens, 2005). In recognition of my familiarity to the study setting, I used member checks at the end of the interviews to confirm that my notes reflected the respondents' position. After each question, I summarized the responses of the clients for them and then asked them if I had captured the information correctly. At the end of the interviews, I also summarized all the information gathered from the interview and requested the participants to verify if the summary was a correct representation of what they had said.

Ethical Considerations

Gay and Peter (2003) have identified keeping participants as informed as possible about the research study, and making every effort to protect participants from harm as the two basic and fundamental ethical principles for researchers. In all proceedings, I introduced myself, clearly stated the purpose of my study, and informed participants of their right of choice either to participate or not. The respondents were assured of confidentiality in dealing with their personal information as well as anonymity which was guarded by using codes instead of their names. At the beginning of the interviews the consent of the participants to tape record the interviews was sought and obtained.

The recorded tapes were stored in a place that could not be accessed by other people for the duration of the study. I personally did the transcription of tapes and typing of the respondents' data. At the end of the study, that is, when the final report has been produced, submitted for assessment, and graded, I would personally destroy the tapes. The formal, informed consent of all respondents and any other person who might have to be approached prior to, and throughout the data collection process, was always sought and obtained.

Data Analysis Procedure

Content analysis was used in analyzing the interview data. According to Merriam (1998) "all qualitative data analysis is content analysis in that it is the content of interviews, field notes, and documents that is analyzed" (p. 160). In addition, Gay and Peter (2003) indicated that data analysis in qualitative research "begins from the initial interaction with participants, and continues that interaction throughout the entire study" (p. 228). Busch et al. (2005) have described content analysis as a:

research tool used to determine the presence of certain words or concepts within texts or sets of texts. Researchers quantify and analyze the presence, meanings and relationships of such words and concepts, then make inferences about the messages within the texts, the writer(s), the audience, and even the culture and time of which these are a part (para.)

This implies that the number of occurrences of words, statements, phrases, and concepts within the interview data collected from all sources was established, analyzed, and interpreted. The diary notes from the beginning to the end of the data collection process and the notes made during the interviews were also used in analyzing the data.

The data analysis procedure started with a verbatim transcription of all the six interviews. I personally typed the data directly from the tapes using a Dictaphone. I then carefully read the transcribed data several times and came up with recurring patterns of meaning emerging from the

data. Categories and sub-categories were formed and the words, phrases, statements, and concepts that were related to the each sub-category and category were counted for purposes of establishing occurrences. The data from the recorded tapes, and the diary notes were coded, classified into categories, and linked to the questions on the semi-structured interview guide that was used in the study.

Reporting of Results

The structure of the report was guided by the interview guide used in this study. Each question was addressed separately and the themes generated by the study were matched with the questions. The responses were interpreted and reported using descriptions and direct quotations from the interviews and diary notes. According to Patton (2002), “sufficient description and direct quotations should be included to allow the reader to enter into the situation and thoughts of the people represented in the report” (p. 503). Mertens (2005), on the other hand, maintained that the use of direct quotations will ensure that the voices of the least empowered are not lost. In this context, the quotes from the interviews which were done in Sesotho were not translated in order to retain the voices of the respondents as well as the cultural richness of the data. Where necessary, tables will also be used in reporting the results.

Limitations of the Study

In common with qualitative studies, this study was based on a relatively small sample of part-time adult learners in higher education. The results of the study can, therefore, not be generalized. Another limitation to be recognized was the equal representation of participants in terms of marital status which formed part of the criterion of the study sample could not be realized because of the composition of the selected group. Despite these limitations, the depth of this study rather than the scope will contribute to knowledge and understanding of the experiences of the part-time adult learners and the mechanisms that they use to manage stress.

Summary

This chapter presented the method and design of the study. The chapter provided the description of applied qualitative approach as well as justification for its use in the study. The setting of the study, population and sample were also described. Furthermore, the chapter covered the sampling procedure which combined criterion and snowball sampling procedures, the research instruments, and data collection process which involved individual interviews. Issues of validity, reliability, credibility, and ethical considerations were also explained. Lastly, the data analysis procedure which was mainly content analysis, reporting of the results, and the limitations of the study were presented.

CHAPTER FOUR

THE RESULTS

This chapter presents the research results of the study on daily-hassle stress experienced by part-time adult learners in higher education and the coping strategies that they used. The presentation of results will start off with the description of the participants, followed by the analysis of the data collected through interviews. The interview guide that was used in this study provided the framework for the presentation of results. Each question was addressed separately and the categories emanating from the interview data were discussed under relevant questions.

Characteristics of the Participants

Six part-time adult learners participated in the study. These were students in their third year of degree in adult education at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS) of the National University of Lesotho (NUL). The experience of the participants in adult learning varied from five-and-a-half (5½) years to seven-and-a-half (7½) years, depending on the level at which they started the adult education program, that is, certificate or diploma in adult education level. The sample comprised males and females residing at different geographical locations in Lesotho, such as, Maseru, Leribe, and Mafeteng.

The sample of six (6) part-time adult learners had equal representation by gender. The age of the participants ranged from thirty (30) to over fifty (50) years. Majority of the participants (50%) were aged between 40 – 44 years. The occupations of participants were diverse and they included secretary, senior office coordinator, field facilitator, civil servant, and police officer.

Five out of the six participants (83% of the sample) were married with children and an average of 4 dependents other than their own children. One single female parent with one child had no other dependents. This scenario intimated a relationship between marital status and the number

of dependents other than one's own children which was validated by the following statements by married female participants:

“... bane bao ke reng ke baphelisuo ba ka, ha re lule le bona, ke ba bohali”

This meant that the dependents that she had earlier referred to were the in-laws who were not staying together with them.

“mafu a ntlhahelang a ntobileng ke ngoetsi e kholo ...”

Meaning that the participant, being the eldest daughter-in-law she had to take responsibility when there was death in the family.

The statements cited above indicated that upon marriage women acquired dependents other than those in their biological families. Furthermore, the women seemed to place great emphasis on their level responsibility attached to these acquired dependants. This suggestion is based on the observation that not much emphasis was made on responsibilities towards biological dependents of the women, coupled with the fact that the single female participant indicated that she did not have any dependents other than her own child. It could, therefore, be argued that there was a relationship between marital status and the number of dependents that one had.

Results of the Interview Data

I categorized the results according to the research questions, and the results of each question were reported separately. Issues of gender, marital status, and geographical location were factored into the discussions under each question.

The media of communication in conducting the interviews were both Sesotho and English. At the beginning of each interview the respondents were made aware of their freedom to use any of the two languages. I began all the interviews in English, and, notably, all the male participants responded in English, while all the female participants preferred Sesotho. My observation was that

the interviews that were done in Sesotho, that is, the mother tongue, were more detailed and expressive than those that were done in English.

The responses were reported using descriptions, direct quotations, as well as diary notes. In view of the fact that my audience was likely to include Sesotho speakers, I decided not to translate the Sesotho interviews into English. This was done for purposes of retaining the cultural richness of the data. However, interpretations of all the direct quotations from the Sesotho interviews were provided immediately after the quote. Tables and figures were also used in reporting the results.

Question 1: What is the nature and scope of daily hassle stress experienced by part-time adult learners in higher education at IEMS?

The participants were to identify social, economic, and academic activities which they performed on a daily basis. The content analysis of the interview data was grouped into three categories namely, social, economic, and academic activities. Statements, phrases, or words that fell under each of the three categories were counted to determine the number of times participants mentioned something associated with that particular category. The content analysis of the activities performed by the part-time adult learners on a daily basis was as reflected in Table 1. The activities are categorized into social, economic, and academic activities. The number indicated against each category represents the frequency at which the statements, phrases, or words occurred during the interviews. Academic activities seemed to be the major area of focus for the participants as it was the most frequently mentioned (56). This was followed by the social activities (28) and then economic activities (25). This result denotes the significance attached to the academic activities by the part-time adult learners. A discussion of each of the three categories and their subcategories as illustrated in Table 1 will follow.

Table 1

Content Analysis of Daily Activities Performed by the Part-time Adult Learners

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-categories</i>
Social activities (28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reproductive roles (10)• Community maintenance activities (15)• Leisure (3)
Economic activities (25)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Travel between home and office (3)• Office work (20)• Field work/work-related travel (2)
Academic activities (56)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Face-to-face class sessions (9)• Individual study (16)• Search for material/library work (5)• Group work (18)• Examinations (8)

Social activities

The social activities carried out by the part-time adult learners were divided into three sub-categories. These were: reproductive roles (10), community maintenance activities (15), and leisure (3).

The reproductive roles. The reproductive roles covered household chores and helping the children with their homework. These roles were identified as part of the social activities by female respondents only.

The following were some of the statements which referred to the reproductive roles played by women:

“normally ke tsoha ka bo 4:00, ke bale, ... mohlomong ke leke bo ho hleka ka tlung ...”

Meaning that she normally woke up around 4:00 a.m., read, and then tried to tidy up the house.

“Ke qala pele ke bone hore ke siea lelapa le le ... le haeba le se le sa hloeka bo bokalo, che le sheba-shebahale, bana ba hloekile, ntho tse jeoang li bohahala li le teng”

This means that she usually started her day by ensuring that the house was fairly clean, the children were clean, and there was food in the house before she left for work.

“mantsiboea ka ‘nete teng ke ee ke utloe ke khathetse, e be ha ke bale. Che ke ee ke thuse ngoana’ka la bo li assignment tsa hae”.

The essence of this phrase is that in the evenings she was usually too tired to do her own reading. However, she helped her child with his assignments.

“ntho eo ke shebanang le eona haholo mantsiboea ke ngoana ... u fumana hore u fuoe li assignments ...”.

In the evenings I mainly focus on my child’s assignments.

All the male participants mainly began the description of their day from the time they got to the office. I then posed a direct question regarding what they did at home in the morning prior to their departure for work. Their responses were as follows:

“I usually wake up so early, so that I get to my office at about 7:00 ... as you know, we men, we don’t usually ... we don’t like clean. No, I don’t take cleaning as part of my ... I only clean the plates that I have used”.

“I normally prepare myself, get bathed, eat, and leave ... except when I am preparing for examinations ... by the time when I am preparing for my examinations normally I wake up at half-past four or five o’clock”.

Generally, the part-time adult learners indicated that their days were longer than the normal 12-hour day. Their days mainly started from 4:00 am to 12:00 midnight if they were to accommodate their

economic, academic, and social activities. The days were mostly longer for women than men as indicated in the foregoing statements that the women usually woke up around 4:00 a.m. in order to cater for their household chores while men woke up a few hours later, except at times of examinations.

Notwithstanding the gender differences regarding the time at which the respondents started their day, one male participant summarized his experience of long days by indicating that “what one has to do to be successful, I think it is just a matter of sacrificing. You have to, as I indicated earlier, for one to cope with this situation one has to suffer ... you have to sleep later than what one would do if you are not committed”.

Community Maintenance Activities. The community maintenance activities that were mentioned by the participants included attending funerals, participation in social clubs and other community activities, as well as going to Church. Both men and women were involved in these activities. However, the female participants viewed their inability to participate in some of the social activities very seriously. The women seemed to be more concerned about how the society perceived their non-participation in community activities. The concern was articulated by a female participant who expressed the pain associated with her inability to attend funerals of friends and relatives coupled with the fact that

“ba bang batho, bo motseng mane, ha ba utloisise hore u na le mathata. So, le eona e baka stress”

Meaning that the people out there in the village do not understand that adult learners had challenges that limited their social participation and this was stressful.

On the contrary, one male participant who shared the view that the social participation of part-time adult learners was limited maintained that the situation was not stressful to him. He stated as follows:

“... we don't usually attend funerals, we don't usually attend 'pitsos' (public gatherings). Yes, socially its ... it is really affecting us negatively because we don't fully participate. You miss some meetings, and if there are some developmental clubs, associations, or whatever, when you are nominated you have to turn it down because you are committed and you won't have time to participate”.

However, the participant went further to explain that he did not really feel bad when he was unable to attend a funeral because he knew that it was not out of his own choice, and he also knew that his focus was to get academic qualifications. In responding to my question regarding how he would handle a situation where a funeral was at a neighbor's place, he replied as follows:

“I don't think I will have to sacrifice my studies and go to the neighbor's funeral instead of going to school. My wife is still there and she will attend the funeral”.

The participant went on to say that he would also approach the neighbor's family to explain that he had other commitments. In this regard, the male respondent did not show as much concern about how the society viewed his non-participation as the female respondent. His worry would only be to ensure that the affected family understood his situation, and not the rest of the society.

Leisure. Leisure came up as one of the subcategories under social activities. The activities associated with leisure entailed watching television after hours, and spending quality time with the family. Remarkably, phrases related to leisure were cited only by male participants who stated as follows:

“I also play football, so I spend most of my spare time at the ground”.

“So, that's what I do when I arrive at home. I just take off the uniform and sit and watch television before I go to sleep”.

The aspect of spending quality time with the family was suggested by male participants who maintained as follows:

“I normally want to be with my children until they go to bed. After that I really concentrate on my studies”.

“I have brothers and sisters whom I am struggling to try to help them and give them a better education than I had. So, that means I spend a lot of time with them trying to prepare their mind ... if they don't get enough guidance, they give up to these hardships and say 'I'm born to suffer, therefore, that's something I cannot change'”.

In contrast to the leisure that male participants had, two married female participants alluded to having no time for leisure at all, indicating that:

“weekend tse ling ke tla sekolong, tse ling ha ke tle sekolong. Joale tseo ke sa tleng sekolong, u tla fumana hore motho hangata joale le ha u sa tle sekolong ha u khone le hore u phomole ... ka baka la mafu, u fumana e se e le mafu, e le lintho tse ngata tsena tse etsahalang”.

The interpretation of this statement is that even on weekends when she does not have to go to school, there were always other social events like funerals and many others that she had to attend. As a result, she never got time rest. Another respondent complained that she had to get up very early from the 1st to the 30th of every month because there was not even a free Saturday for her. In her own words, she said:

“joale ua utloa hore 'na etlare ho tloha la 1 la khoeli ho isa la 30 la khoeli ke tla be ntse ke tsoha hoseng ho hong le ho hong, ho sena moqebelo oo ke reng 'ache, ona ke sa itse kh'efu!'”.

Based on the foregoing, activities associated with leisure were only identified by the male respondents while female participants expressed frustration over not having time for leisure at all.

Economic Activities

The economic activities performed by the part-time adult learners were productive activities (20), which were mostly white collar jobs, and travel between home and the work place (3).

Productive activities. The productive activities were said to take most part of the day for all six participants irrespective of their job designations. This was evidenced by the following statements:

“I spent most of my time at work, from half-past seven up to six o’clock”.

“I am working in the office where time really is not the matter. What matters is whether the work has been done because during the weekends I am sometimes called to come and do some work”.

“I am committed from ... at times from 7 to half-past five”.

“I get to my office at about 7:00 a.m. ... thereafter I will make sure that around 5:00 p.m. I am through with my schedule ... on Saturdays when I am not at school I make sure I am at work so that I can relieve my assistants”

“ke tlameha ho tloha mona ka bo-six”. “... ka nako e ngoe ... ka bo 10 ke hona ke fihlang”.

Meaning that she has to leave her house around 6:00 a.m. and at times came back around 10:00 p.m.

“ke qala ka 8:00 a.m. ... ebe re chaea ka five ke ea hae”. I start from 8:00 a.m. and go home at 5:00 p.m.

The foregoing statements implied that the participants generally spent most of their time on economic activities as the work-related activities generally began around 7:00 a.m. and ended at 5:00 p.m. This meant that a total of ± 10 hours a day were spent on economic activities.

Travel between home and the work place. Travel between home and the work place was another trigger of stress which was identified by the part-time adult learners who lived in one district and worked in another. For example, one participant lived in Maseru and worked in

Mafeteng. As a result, she had to travel a minimum distance of 144 km per day (round trip) on public transport. Her duty involved field work and this implied that at times when she got to her work place, she had to travel even further. This situation was reflected as stressful by her report that:

“u fumana hore ka nako e ‘ngoe ka bo ... e se ntse e le bo 7 ke hona motho o tlohang mono mosebetsing, ke hona motho u tlo tla fetela moo o phelang teng. Nqe ‘ngoe u fihla late, ka bo 10 ke hona u fihlang”

Meaning that at times when she has gone out to do some field work, she leaves the site at 7:00 p.m. for her office, then pass on to her place of residence (77 km) and probably gets home around 10:00 p.m.

Another respondent (male) whose home was in Mohale’s Hoek yet he worked in Leribe had to travel a total of 220 km on a weekly basis.

Academic Activities

The academic activities identified by the part-time adult learners were: face-to-face class sessions (9), individual study (16), search for material/library work (5), study groups/group work (18), and examinations (8). A discussion of the academic activities follows.

Face-to-face class sessions. The participants stated that on certain weekends they attended face-to-face class sessions at the Institute of Extra-Mural Studies (IEMS). In between the weekends scheduled for classes the part-time adult learners undertook individual study mainly at their homes in the evenings.

Individual study. The participants had this to say regarding available time for individual study:

“... around 9:00 p.m. and up to 11:00 p.m., I take on my studies”.

“I normally concentrate on my studies in the evening after ten o’clock ... may be to 12”

“Ka shoalane ha ho so thotse ho itse tuu, bana ba ile likamoreng tsa bona, ke eona nakonyana eo ke sheba-shebang ka eona. Joale u tsebe ke se ke khathetse hakere!”

Meaning that in the evenings when the children have gone to their bedrooms and it is quiet, that is when she tried to do her academic work. However, she was usually tired at that time. One participant indicated in the following statement that he stole some office time to do individual study or assignments:

“Normally I steal time at work to do my academic work, especially if say it is with the assignments that I have to submit”.

Search for material/library work. The part-time adult learners again identified library work as part of their academic activities. This included search for material on the internet, library, or any other resource centre. The general feeling was that their search for material usually required them to go elsewhere because the IEMS library did not have sufficient material. This could be seen in statements like:

“Feela joale IEMS ea rona e sena libuka tse lekaneng ... ha ena libuka. Joale re ne re eea bo Transformation mona ke hona moo o tla fumana libuka teng ...”

The statement translated to: ‘our IEMS’ had no books and as a result we had to go to places like the Transformation Resource Centre (TRC).

“... because the library, I am using TRC. Because I have seen with IEMS, I have tried several times, I have a card but I never used it because several times when I go there, you don’t get the books that you are looking for”.

Study groups/group work. The part-time adult learners also engaged in study groups/group work which was used as one of the teaching and learning methods at IEMS. The groups usually met outside the normal class schedule as shown in the following statement:

“... we normally meet after working hours at 5:30 p.m. to 7:00 p.m., at times to 7:30 p.m.”.

“... li weekend boholo ba tsona re li sebelisa sebakeng sa li study group”.

This means that the part-time adult learners spent most of their weekends on study groups.

“... ha ke re mane ha rona re ithuta ka li-group, joale li group hore e tle e be ke li group, li ts'oanetse li be le nako ea discussion ...”.

Meaning, at our institution we learn through group work and in order for the groups to be effective there has to be time for discussion. These statements confirmed that study groups formed an important aspect of learning for the adult learners, and therefore, they were viewed as a vital academic activity.

Examinations. Examinations were also brought up as one of the academic activities that were carried out by the part-time adult learners. Not much was said about the tasks related to the examinations except for creating extra time to read and revision that was done either individually or in groups.

Question 2: What feelings do part-time adult learners in higher education experience in performing social, economic, and academic roles?

I asked the participants to describe the feelings that they experienced as they performed the social, economic, and academic activities and also to illustrate circumstances or situations which triggered such feelings.

The identified feelings that were experienced by the part-time adult learners as they executed their daily activities were feelings of inadequacy (9), sadness (11), anger (28), fear and anxiety (24), and potency (3). Anger was the most occurring feeling amongst the participants, while feelings of potency were the least experienced. The following is a discussion of each of the categories of feelings illustrated in Table 2 as well as situations cited as triggers of such feelings.

Table 2

Content Analysis of the Feelings Encountered by the Part-time Adult Learners

<i>Category</i>	<i>Number of Occurrence</i>
Inadequacy (9)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Exhaustion (6)• helplessness (3)
Sadness (11)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Unhappy (5)• Loneliness (6)
Anger (28)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Impatience (1)• Frustration (27)
Fear and anxiety (24)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Overwhelmed (16)• Worry (8)
Potency (3)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Determination (3)

The Feelings of Inadequacy

The feelings of inadequacy that were expressed by the part-time adult-learners were divided into two sub-categories. These were feelings of exhaustion (5) and helplessness (3).

Feelings of exhaustion. These feelings were related to office work which took up most of their time and energy such that at the end of the day they were too tired to do either their social or academic roles. This was evidenced by statements like:

“ ... considering the fact that at night I am worn out, during the day at least I’ve got strength to do school work”.

“sometimes we have a lot of work at our offices ... sometimes it gets very hectic, because even doing your assignments you will find that its very ... I am so tired, after having my meals I just fall asleep”.

“Normally, I steal time at work to do my academic work because really at night always I feel tired”.

Feelings of helplessness. The feelings of helplessness were mainly associated with situations where the participants were unable to access study material or resources. The participants maintained that the institutional library had inadequate material, and that the modules that they were provided with were outdated and therefore, required to be backed up by up-to-date information. Other resources, such as the internet, were also not accessible to all students. While this was a general situation experienced by all the participants, its impact was felt more by the part-time adult learners who lived in districts other than Maseru. This was revealed by following statements:

“Mafeteng ha ke re ha e bule library, li mona Maseru feela. Joale le internet ke haeba ke ilo patala internet café, u tla fumana hore joale motho o ilo nka nako u ntso u phetla, u phetla, u ilo nts’ a chelete e ngata haholo”.

This meant that there were no libraries in Mafeteng, and that it was too costly for her to pay internet cafés to search for material.

“... we are not like people who are staying in Maseru because there are a lot of centers where they can get information to do their work. But with us, it is not easy because we are from Thaba-Tseka, I was once in Thaba-Tseka and there is nothing like internet there. That means if we have divided work amongst ourselves and said ‘you will concentrate on this part, and you will concentrate on this part’ that means the person from Thaba-Tseka, for instance, will not be able to come up with something that will be very, very, very, satisfactory and very meaningful. Not because he is lazy or not because she doesn’t want to do the work, but because the environment prevents him to contribute effectively to the writing of whatever paper we are asked to do”.

The participants attributed their poor performance to lack of study resources that they had no control over, hence the feelings of helplessness. Helplessness was further alluded to in situations where the participants felt that they were not being treated fairly by the staff of IEMS. In such cases the participants maintained as follows:

“... and the group work marks, is the same as the attitude of IEMS staff whereby you have to ... in order to carry on with your studies, just leave them as they are. Because sometimes I will come all the way from home, Mohale’s Hoek (125km) or Leribe (95 km), I take a chance and pop in, and look for result slip or a letter that you are going to attach when you apply for leave. They will say ‘today we are not going to work on this, we are only working on this’. Just taking a paper and giving it to you! She will say ‘only Fridays. Please come on Friday’”.

In cases as the one narrated above, the participant felt helpless because of his perception that there was not much that he could do. He further observed as follows:

“You see the problem is, who can we ... from the onset, who can we report to? Because the coordinators themselves, as you see how they are doing their work and ... you see there is little that they do”

The Feelings of Sadness

The sadness experienced by the part-time adult learners was classified into two subcategories, namely, unhappiness (5) and loneliness (6).

Unhappiness. The unhappiness encountered by the adult learners was mainly triggered by situations where there was a clash of social, economic, and academic activities which forced them make difficult choices that left them with feelings of sadness. Examples of cases where one had to choose between attending funerals of close friends or relatives and carrying on with academic activities were made. One participant expressed her sadness in stating that:

“Hae! Weekend eona e bohloko ... groupung ea ka re kopana ka weekend ... ene weekend hakere ke nako eo ho uoang bo li funeraleng, ene batho ba bang u tla thola hore ke bakhotsi ba hau ba hlokahetseng kapa li relative tsa hau, ha u khone ...”

The participant explained that weekends were a ‘painful’ or sad period because her group met on weekends. At times the meetings clashed with funerals of friends or relatives and one does not manage to attend the funerals. Another participant cited her experience follows:

“... ha ke ne ke tlo tla ke ngola final ea year 2, ke ne ke le lipakeng, ngoaneso eo ke tsoetsoeng le eena oa number 4 a hlokahetse, ea tsoetsoeng le monna oa ka oa number 4 a hlokahetse ka nako e le ‘ngoe ...”

This meant that at the time when she had to write her second year examinations, she had a dilemma in that her fourth biological brother, as well as her fourth brother-in-law had passed away around the same time. Her dilemma was aggravated by the fact that she was a first born in her biological family, and her husband was also a first born in his family. Culturally, this placed them in a leadership or headship position that came with a lot of responsibility. In this situation, any choice that she could make would still leave her with feelings of sadness, be it for not writing examinations or not carrying out her full social responsibility of making funeral arrangements.

Other feelings of unhappiness experienced by one participant were related to a dysfunctional group relationship caused by her inability to attend group meetings due to her work pressure. This resulted in the group being divided between those who were empathic to her and those who were not. This situation saddened her a lot.

Loneliness. Loneliness was another feeling associated with sadness which could be sensed predominantly amongst the participants who did not live in Maseru. The learners felt isolated and, to some extent, left out because of the separation in space amongst themselves as well as between themselves and other learners who lived in Maseru. The general feeling was that the part-time adult

learners who lived in Maseru were more advantaged because it was easier for their groups to meet even during week days; they also had access to libraries, the internet, and other related facilities like photocopiers; and the groups met at IEMS, which was viewed as a place conducive to learning. The participants who lived in other districts further justified their perception by stating that generally, both the individual and group performance of students who resided in Maseru was much better than theirs, as well as in examinations. The feelings of isolation and loneliness could be sensed in the statements such as:

“... if there are people who are staying here and they come here every evening to brainstorm, to put their work into perspective, what about us? ... we are going to just gather information and put it not in the logical way sometimes. So, that means even if we have the potential do to the work good or well, the conditions ... the circumstances prevent us to achieve that. I am not saying sometimes we cannot do bad, we can do bad because we can find the questions difficult even if the material are around here. But most of the time, the circumstances play a negative part”.

The feelings of Anger

Feelings of anger manifested by impatience (1) and frustration (27) were expressed by the participants.

Impatience. Impatience was illustrated in the case of a female part-time learner who normally arrived home around 10:00 p.m. to find her child waiting to be helped with homework. Her child was only in grade one. The situation was also exacerbated by the fact that the participant had recently relocated to Maseru and as a result, the child was struggling to adjust in a new school. This was how she described her experience and feelings associated with it:

“Le eona eno ea ngoana e ntse e n-stressa hobane joale ke fihla late. Ke bona ke sa mo fe nako e lekaneng ea ... eo ke tlamehang ho mo fa eona ... u tla fumana hore ha ke fihla bosiu

joale ... e le hona ke mo thusang ka assignment ... ke fumane hore joale ha a bala buka, ke hona re tlamehang ho lula fatse a bale, o se a ts'oeroe ke boroko, kea mo omanyana ...”.

The participant expressed her perception that she was stressed because she came home late and as a result, she felt that she was not giving her child enough time or attention. Usually when she came home the child would not have done her reading assignment, the child would be drowsy, yet she had to help her to read. In the process, at times she lost her temper and yelled at the child. Such impatience or loss of temper could be associated with exhaustion and even frustration brought about by her circumstances.

Frustration. This sub-category (identified 27 times) was the most frequently occurring feeling that was experienced by the participants. The main source of frustration for the part-time adult learners was study groups. The participants distinguished study groups as one of their major stressors due to factors like personality differences, lack of commitment by some members, attitudes based on political affiliations of others, and at times, genuine inability of other members to attend meetings due to work pressure.

In the case of groups made up of people who lived in different districts additional factors that were mentioned were: separation in space, limited time for group meetings, travel expenses to group meeting venues, communication, inaccessibility of study material and resources, and lack of space conducive to learning. For example, in one group of four participants, one lived in Mafeteng (a distance of about 77 km south of Maseru), one in Mohale's Hoek (125 km south of Maseru), one in Thaba-Tseka (195 km towards the central of Maseru), and the other one lived in Maseru. Another group of three consisted of members residing in Leribe (95 km north), Butha-Buthe (128 km north), and Mokhotlong (263 km). Participants from these groups expressed frustration in stating that:

“even today as I speak, we still have an assignment to make a poster. It is very difficult to make a final copy ...”.

“ I find it very, very, very, disturbing when we have to do the work because we will be communicating through telephones, sending fax ... we are pressured to finish the work within a certain period of time ... and we have to spend a lot of money, the money that we didn't expect that we would pay”.

“Working in groups is very hectic. It is very hectic and sometimes impossible because we have different characters. Even today as I speak, we still have an assignment to make a poster. It is very difficult to make a final copy ...”

Notwithstanding the frustration brought about by the study groups, the unity and solidarity that existed in one study group of members who did not live in Maseru was remarkable. The group members felt the responsibility to support and help each other through the program. This was demonstrated by the sharing of blame and guilt that was expressed by one participant in a case where one of her group members had to repeat a course. The participant was very emotional and tearful as she talked about the issue. She expressed herself as follows:

“... re batla hore kaofela group eno ea rona re performe hantle re le group, ho se ke haeba ea morao ... e mong oa rona hona tjena hona le thuto eo a neng a e hulanya, ea philosophy. E ne e re ja, e ne e re utloisa bohloko ... re re 'ho bohahala hore groupung ea rona mona ha rea thusanang ho lekana'”.

In a nutshell, the group aspired to do well and to ensure that none of the members was left behind. When the other member had to repeat a philosophy course, the other members blamed themselves for not having put enough effort to help each other.

Another source of frustration that was indicated by the participants was the attitude of some facilitators and staff members of IEMS. The frustration related to the attitude of some of the IEMS staff members was cited as follows:

“I think one of the challenges is the one with the institution itself, IEMS. IEMS is one of the institutions which should take our responsibilities and complaints in a serious manner because, as an adult, when I go to the office of the coordinator of IEMS, tell him or her that I was committed at work ... I failed to write exams during class sessions because I was out on a course, work-related, they really don't take such things into consideration ... and it is them, the coordinators and staff of IEMS who can motivate us more to undertake these studies ... But the problem that we face there is very, very, very, hectic. Sometimes you feel like 'I'm still working and earning and, why should I bother myself with ... why should I carry on with studies because even if I carry on or I don't carry on, I will still be employed and ...'”.

Fear and Anxiety

Fear and anxiety were connected to the feelings of being overwhelmed (16) and worried articulated by the participants in general. Such feelings could be sensed in the following statements:

“ke eona ntho ena ea ho bala, ho boima! ... ehlile ho boima! ha ho na leave ... ha no na letho” .

In this statement the participant emphasized that ‘it was tough ... it was very tough! She further explained that she had no time to read and she could not even go on leave due the pressure of work.

“... it is not much possible to do my studies because I am committed from ... at times from 7:00 a.m. to 5:30 p.m.”

“Well, it is very strenuous ... the point I wanted to stress is that it is not easy at all to do my academic work”

“We are only three but it is very difficult to make a group and discuss ...”

Generally, the fear and anxiety stemmed from the worry that the participants might not perform well in their studies because they did not have adequate time, and also that their performance was threatened by group dynamics as well as the inadequacy of study resources. Fear could also be recognized in cases where learners had issues with facilitators or coordinators, which had to be resolved. They preferred to remain silent for fear of victimization as indicated in the following statement:

“You see, the problem is, we know we can report, we can go to some further steps. But the problem is, the victim will remain yourself ... it will add more problems, and this one will be personal. And you cannot challenge it, no ways!”

Potency

Despite the feelings of being overwhelmed by the demands of activities performed by the part-time adult learners which threatened their academic success, it was very encouraging to note the feelings of potency reflected in their determination to complete their studies. This was evidenced by statements such as:

“... I find myself to be under a lot of pressure which, if I did not have the motive or the intention of being here, I would have dropped long time ago ... I could have dropped off ...”

“Ntho e 'ngoe eo ke eeng ke e etse kea kholoa ke ho its'elisa feela ka ba ileng ba feta ...

Hona le e mong eo ke tsebang hore o ne a tloha Mokhotlong a tla mona IEMS. Kore ke eena motho eo ke ke eng ke mo nahane pele, ke re 'feela o qetile hona tjena ebile o ile a pasa.”

The participant explained that she usually comforted herself by looking up to those who made it. She further made an example of one person who lived in Mokhotlong (263 km away from Maseru), yet she made it through and passed.

Question 3: How do part-time adult learners in higher education appraise their experiences in relation to stress?

The participants were required to name the activities that they found to be most stressful to them. The outcome was as indicated in Table 3.

Table 3

Content Analysis of the Most Stressful Activities Performed by the Part-time Adult Learners

<i>Activity</i>	<i>Number of Occurrence</i>
Study groups/group work	19
Search for study resources	6
Resolving clashes between social, economic, and academic activities	6

Study Groups

The activities that were identified as the most stressful were study groups (19), search for study resources (6), and resolving clashes between social, economic, and academic activities (6). While the participants acknowledged the positive effects of study groups, they maintained that study groups induced a lot of stress for them. Generally, the activities that generated stress for the part-time adult learners who resided in Maseru included inability of members to attend group meetings and lack of commitment by some members. The impact of study groups seemed to be felt more by the part-time adult learners who lived in districts other than Maseru. The main challenge being the distance between their geographical locations which resulted in high expenses associated with travel to study venues (which implied travel from one district to the other), and communication. The study venues that were used were not conducive to learning as in most cases it would be places of residence, and the groups also had limited time for meetings as they had to travel back to their places of residence. All these challenges were identified as most stressful to the part-time adult

learners who lived in rural areas as well as dispersed geographical locations because such obstacles affected their performance negatively.

The Search for Study Resources

The search for study material and/or resources was mentioned as most stressful six times. However, one participant did not find the search for material to be stressful because she worked in an institution of higher learning where facilities like the internet as well as senior staff, some of whom were adult educators by profession, were supportive to her learning activity. Learners who lived in rural areas were again the hardest hit by this situation as evidenced in the following statements:

“... because even the assignment that we have to do, the poster one, some of the facilities we still maintain that they should be available at IEMS, not that we have to rent everything that we have to use”

“... we have been renting and may be using our own, may be computers and digital cameras ... we have to travel to Ficksburg to get some of these ... a scanner, a colored scanner, even the printer ... a colored printer.

“I have email facility but other members do not have email addresses”.

Resolving Clashes between Social, Economic, and Academic Activities

This was identified as one of the most stressful challenges that required the part-time adult learners to make difficult choices. For example, one female participant lived with the guilt of not giving her child enough attention yet she had to fulfill economic and academic activities for the sake of the child as well. The clash of roles also exposed the participants to feelings of guilt and worry in cases where they were to prioritize between societal expectations and academic demands. The effect of the clashes could be seen in statements like:

“Pressure e hlaha haholo from the society. Hakere society le eona e ntse lebeletse hore kannete re performe li social roles tse itseng? Ene ha u sa li etse ha no no ba monate. Ua utloa le uena ha u na le mathata, kemang ea tla ea ha hau?”

In a nutshell, the participant raised concern over the fact that the pressure mostly came from the society. The society expected the part-time adult learners to perform certain social roles. If they did not perform the expected roles, then one wondered how the society would respond in her time of need.

At times the participants had to deal with clashes between their economic and academic roles. The clashes that occurred were mainly related to times when the participants were under examinations pressure like in the following case:

“At one time, that was when I was doing my first year degree, the Prime Minister was supposed to hold a pitso (public gathering) at Maseru. Same Friday that I had to be writing examinations, and I was the person who was actually going to officiate at the public gathering.”

Examinations were, therefore, viewed as one of the most stressful activities especially in cases where there were clashes between the examinations and other social and economic activities.

Question 4: What coping strategies do the part-time adult learners in higher education employ in order to manage stress?

The participants were asked to identify the ways in which they normally dealt with stress. My observation was that some of the participants were not fully aware of the strategies that helped them to manage stress. However, through questioning and probing during the interviews they were able to reflect on their actions and began to realize that they were indeed using certain coping mechanisms which were even effective in helping them to deal with stress. This lack of awareness was indicated by the following remarks coupled with the non-verbal cues that I observed:

“Yes! That is a very good question ... in fact ...”

“We normally ... that’s good ... we ...”

The non-verbal cues that went along with these remarks portrayed the participants as asking themselves: ‘yes, that’s a good question, what is it that I do? How do I cope with stress?’ The coping strategies which were identified by the participants were as shown in Table 4.

Table 4

Content Analysis of the Coping Strategies Employed by the Part-time Adult Learners

<i>Category</i>	<i>Sub-categories</i>
Social support (22)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Significant others (8)• Colleagues (6)• Friends (5)• Social support groups (1)
Emotion-focused coping (17)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Acceptance (9)• Motivation (8)
Problem-focused coping (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Communication (6)• Time-management (7)
Relaxation techniques (13)	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Reading (3)• Sleeping (2)• Listening to music, watching TV, or video (2)• Physical exercise (2)• Gardening (4)
Medical help	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Use of medication

The awareness of how the part-time adult learners had been managing their stress was exciting to them and, with this consciousness, they seemed more determined to make a deliberate effort to continue to use the strategies. I grouped the identified strategies adopted by the part-time adult learners into the five categories, namely, social support (22), emotion-focused coping (17), problem-focused coping (13), relaxation techniques (11), and seeking medical help (2). A discussion of the strategies adopted by the part-time adult learners follows.

Social Support

Social support was the strategy that was mainly used by the participants as reflected by the frequency of statements related to social support. The social support was mainly sought from the significant, colleagues, and friends. Not much support was sought from social groups as it was only mentioned once.

Support from the significant others. The significant others whose support was largely solicited included parents, siblings, and spouses. There were, however, some reservations in seeking help from the parents as revealed in the following statement:

“... batsoali ke ee ke qobe hobane u oa fumana motho ha u teana le eena a sa ntse a ena le mathata a mangata, a se a ntse mo imetse. Joale ke itjoetse hore ache ‘joale ke tlo mo imetsa hape, ho betere hore ‘na ke ‘ne ke mo-polishe’”

This meant that she avoided sharing her issues of concern with her parents because usually when she met her parents, she realized that they were already burdened with their own issues. She, therefore, just pretended things were fine to protect the parents from any further emotional baggage. Support from spouses involved spending quality time with them, receiving a phone call from a spouse just to check on them, sharing some issues of concern with them, and physical help like in cases where the spouse would help with the children’s assignments. One participant stated as follows regarding the support from his spouse:

“... besides that I enjoy being with my wife. I think to some extent that brings a very good thing ... it plays a very positive thing in trying to reduce the pressures of work or the pressures of the society, whatever”.

“... even if she could give me the solution to my problem, especially those that are work-related, but talking about that issue with her happens to be a very important stress reliever”.

Support from colleagues. Colleagues were also viewed as playing an important role in reducing stress, mainly through expressing emotional concern or providing assistance in the form of service where necessary. This was reflected in statements like:

“My colleagues are very understanding because they know that I go to school ... sometimes I talk to them and say ‘no, guys on this date I must be in class.’ So, if I am supposed to be on duty on that weekend, someone will say ‘no, I will come, just go. I will come’”.

“ke bile lehlohonolo la ho sebetsa le batho ba supportive, beng ba ka ba bile supportive. Le eena eo ke ntseng ke sebetsa le eena hona joale kannete ke bona a le supportive”.

The participant considered she had always been fortunate to work with supportive supervisors. Even her current supervisor was really supportive.

Support from friends. Friends were also identified as a source of support for some of the learners. The friends were said to provide support either emotionally or just being there to spend time with, as a form of relaxation. However, regarding the aspect of sharing concerns with friends, two of the participants had this to say:

“I usually don’t discuss stressful things with them ... because discussing with them you might get more of stress, the replies and discussion that might come up from them, they might make you feel guilty of having discussed the issue with them. So the best thing is not to discuss with them.”

“... ka ‘nete ka bona eka e ntse’enyetsa nako hobane ke ela feela ho bua mono, ha hona letho mono. Hangata hakere re tla be re bua lintho tse se nang thuso feela! Ka tlohela ka ‘nete”

This meant that she realized that it was just a waste of time to visit friends because usually the discussions were useless.

Social support groups. One of the participants, who lead a support group in her community, mentioned that she found the support group to be helpful in reducing stress. The motto of her support group was “a problem shared is a problem halved” and she really encouraged people to share their issues with others.

Emotion-focused Coping

This category entailed strategies whereby the participants were able to accept a situation and learn to cope with it, and stressful situations which were appraised as motivation.

Acceptance. Acceptance in this context referred to the acknowledgement of a stressful situation followed by regulation of one’s emotional reactions such that they were not negatively affected by the situation. The strategy was the most commonly used, considering the number of times it was mentioned (17). It was primarily used in situations where the participants felt that they had no control over a situation, such as, poor group performance due to either unavailability of resources or inability to hold meaningful group meetings, and undesirable behavior of some of IEMS staff. The coping strategy could be noticed from the following statements:

“It is better to ignore so that you can carry on with your studies happily, without making some clashes with some facilitators”

“Yah, some of the things you just have to leave them as they are. Like the one I mentioned about a group member whereby you see your final script, you see a lot of mistakes, and you are going to get lower marks. What can you do? The only thing I have to do is to work hard

on the other assignments ... individual assignments, and class tests will have to cover those ones”.

Motivation. Emotion-focused coping could also be viewed in cases where the participants either turned negative experiences into a source of motivation or used the motivation behind their studies as a source of encouragement for them to continue with their studies despite all odds. The strategy could be recognized statements such as:

“I think the motivation behind my studies come from myself. I have decided to take my studies because I had realized that I don’t have enough qualifications to meet the challenges either socially or at my work place. So, I made myself clear from the onset that I want to achieve this. So, all these problems and challenges that come in between, I just take them as part of life and what I want is to get through”

Another participant maintained that his wife was a source of motivation for him in the sense that when he graduated for diploma, his wife graduated for her degree. While the feeling was good, he said to himself “no, this is not enough, you should step up the pace and bridge the gap”. This perception boosted his resilience. Lastly, one of the participants mentioned that one of her group members had openly made negative statements about her, and even said that the participant was not likely to graduate. The participant took this negativity as motivation to prove the group member wrong. In her own words she said “*’me joale ke motivation, le haeba o negative ...*” translating to: “this was motivation, negative as it might be.”

Problem-focused Coping

The strategies associated with problem-focused coping were communication (6) and time-management (7).

Communication. Communication involved an attempt to do something constructive to change the stressful circumstances. The strategies that were used by the part-time adult learners

included talking issues over with the concerned people, and immediacy in addressing or confronting issues of concern. The use of such strategies was evidenced by the following statements:

“communication will make it easy for the neighbors to understand your commitments”

“I am that kind of person. If you do me wrong I cannot leave you and just say ‘he is my boss or he is whatever, and I cannot say ...’ no! I take the challenge ... yes, I think it is one of the strategies. Not to harbor issues that are stressing you up”

Time-management. Strategies connected to time-management comprised prioritizing activities, effective use of available time, and creating time for certain activities where possible. The examples that were cited included stealing time from office where possible; and avoiding practices viewed as time-wasting, such as, visiting friends for a worthless chat. One participant stated as follows:

“... oa fumana le hoseng ha ke tsamaea ka koloing, ke se ke tsamaea ke nkile buka. U fumana hore ha e sa tsoa ka mokotleng ... e se e le ona mokhoa oo ke u sebelisang ona ono oa hore le ka taxing, le hona fielding mane hakere u tla fumana hore ha re ntse re emetse ho fepa batho baa u tla fumana hore ha hona ntho eo ke e etsang ...”.

In short, the participant explained that she usually kept a book (study material) in her bag to read in a taxi while in transit to work or at the field during the time where she found herself idling while waiting for foodstuff that had to be distributed to her clientele to be delivered. This was an example of maximizing use of available time.

Relaxation Techniques

These were techniques that were viewed as having the potential to counteract negative effects. I classified the strategies that were identified by the participants into the following sub-categories: reading, sleeping, listening to music, watching television or videos, physical exercises, and gardening.

Reading. Reading was viewed as helping the participants to relax by shifting their attention away from social, academic, and economic activities. I asked a question on whether or not the reading had to do with academic material, the responses from participants were as follows:

“No, no, no, no ... no ... not study material!”

“Normally I enjoy reading Public Eye (a local newspaper) ... not normally school-related material”

“nka mpa ka bala newspaper ...ntho e ‘ngoe feela e sa amaneng le libuka” meaning I would rather read a newspaper, something that was not related to studies.

Sleeping, listening to music, watching television or videos. These mechanisms were also identified by the participants as forms of relaxation which helped them to cope with stress. One of the respondents emphasized that she preferred to watch programs that were about resilient people who persevered against all odds. She stated as follows:

“... haeba ke kenya video, ke rata ebe e nang le molaetsa. Mohlomong motho ea ileng a experienta ntho e itseng eaba joale o oa e hlola”

This meant that whenever she watched a video, it should be about a person who experienced certain challenges but won in the end. Such messages gave her hope that she could also overcome challenges that she met.

Physical exercise. Physical exercise in the form of jogging and playing soccer was cited by only two male participants. One participant combined physical exercise with sleep as indicated in the following statement:

“... even sometimes I get so stressed up that I have to do some road work, I usually run in the afternoon. Thereafter, I wash and get tired and sleep ... I won't do anything ... just sleep”

The participant maintained that physical exercise was very helpful to him. This was evidenced by the statement that:

“... and usually when I am about to write exams, I make sure that a month before exams, I start jogging. Sometimes when I do that, when I study I understand that now I am studying and I am enjoying it”.

Another participant who played soccer cited the activity as one way of reducing stress. He stated as follows:

“That helps me a lot in dealing with stress because I do what I like. Most of the time when you do something that you like, really you forget about troubles that you are experiencing and just focus on the game.”

He further observed that:

“...sometimes the game becomes a problem because when you loose, it’s a problem. But most of the time really it helps me to forget about the pressure and the workload, it helps me a lot”.

Gardening. Gardening was indicated as another strategy that helped four of the participants to cope with stress. In their own words, the experiences associated with gardening were depicted as follows:

“Ke motho ea ratang gardening, haeba ho ena le monyetlanyana, nke ke ee jareteng ... ha ke khutla ke utloa ke le hantle” translating to: I like gardening and whenever opportunity arises, I do garden work. After that I feel relieved.

“Hangata ha ke ena le stress ke motho ea ... ke ee ke utloe ha nka ka sebetsa jareteng ... kore ke rata jarete, mme ha se ntsoere hantle ke ee ke utloe ha nka sebetsa jareteng, ka hla ka sebetsa jareteng, ha ke khutla mono ke ee ke utloe ke khutla ke le hantle”.

This participant, briefly put, expressed her fondness of garden work and that when she had really worked hard on her garden, she felt that her stress levels get reduced.

Medical help

Two of the participants pointed out that they resorted to medical help when they were stressed up. One of the participants viewed this as an effective way to cope with stress, while the other one maintained that it was not very effective. Her observation was as follows:

“Ua tseba ke utloa eka ke tla fa bakhotsi baa ba ka credit! Hobaneng ke ee ke utloe ha ba le teng eka ho itse! Le ho feta ha ke ntse ke enoa lipilisi” meaning that she gave credit to her friends because when she was with them she felt a lot better than she did when she was on medication.

Question5: How effective are the stress coping strategies adopted by the part-time adult learners in higher education?

The participants were asked whether or not they found their identified ways of dealing with stress to be effective. The frequency at which the effectiveness of different coping strategies was indicated was as reflected in Table 5.

Table 5

Content Analysis of the Effectiveness of Coping Strategies adopted by the Part-time Adult Learners

<i>Coping Strategy</i>	<i>Number of Occurrence</i>
Social support	10
Emotion-focused coping	5
Problem-focused coping	6
Relaxation Techniques	6
Medical help	1

Generally, the coping strategies that were mentioned by the part-time adult learners were said to be effective at varying levels. The most frequently occurring coping strategy was social support which was mainly from the immediate family, colleagues, and friends. The emotion-focused coping that was viewed as effective mainly had to do with the intrinsic and extrinsic motivation that the part-time adult learners had. The problem-focused coping strategies that were cited as effective were both communication geared towards changing stressful circumstances and effective management of time. Gardening came out as the mostly used relaxation technique as it was mentioned by four (4) out of the six (6) participants, followed by reading which was identified as effective by three (3) out of the six (6) participants.

Lastly, medical help was referred to by only two (2) participants and was considered to be an effective coping strategy by only one participant. The fact that medical help was viewed as an effective coping strategy by only one (1) out of the six (6) participants rendered it as not very effective in the context of the part-time adult learners at IEMS.

Summary

This chapter presented the findings from the interview data. The presentation covered the demographic characteristics of the participants and the content analysis of the social, economic, and academic activities performed by the part-time adult learners on a daily basis. The feelings experienced by the participants as they carried out the various tasks were also analyzed and ranked in terms of the intensity of stress ascribed to each task by the participants. The feelings that were identified by the participants embraced feelings of inadequacy, sadness, anger, uncertainty, fear and anxiety, as well as potency. The coping strategies employed by the part-time adult learners fell within social support, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, relaxation techniques, and seeking medical help. Social support was the most frequently used mechanism for managing stress and it was also perceived to be the most effective strategy. Other coping strategies that were viewed

as effective included emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, and relaxation techniques.

Medical help was not considered to be very effective.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

The chapter covers an overview of the study, the discussion of the results, and the recommendations. An overview of the study highlights the problem and purpose, research questions, method, and data analysis. The discussion of the results is divided into three sub-headings, namely, the nature and scope of daily hassle stress experiences by the part-time adult learners, feelings associated with the experiences and appraisals made by the participants, and the coping strategies adopted by the part-time adult learners. Lastly, the conclusions will be drawn from the findings of the study and recommendations will be made to policy and decision-makers in institutions of higher learning that run partial or full distance education programs, adult learners in both part-time and full-time programs, as well as to the theory and practice of counseling.

Overview of the Study

The Problem and Purpose of the Study

Part-time adult learners in higher education are prone to daily hassle stress induced by the demands for them to perform academic, economic, and academic demands. The purpose of the study was to identify the nature of daily hassle stress experienced by the part-time adult learners in Lesotho, and also to determine the effectiveness of the coping mechanisms that they employed. The study addressed the following questions:

- 1) What is the nature and scope of daily hassle stress experienced by part-time adult learners in higher education?
- 2) What feelings do part-time adult learners in higher education experience in performing social, economic, and academic roles?
- 3) How do part-time adult learners in higher education appraise their experiences in relation to stress?

- 4) What coping strategies do the part-time adult learners in higher education employ in order to manage stress?
- 5) How effective are the stress coping strategies adopted by the part-time learners in higher education?

Methodology and Data Analysis

The study adopted the applied qualitative research approach. Content analysis was used in analyzing the data collected through interviews, diary notes, and interview notes on experiences, feelings, and coping mechanisms applied by the part-time adult learners. I used a combination of snowball sampling and criterion sampling to select six (6) key informants from the part-time learners who were in their third year of degree in adult education. The interviews were conducted during the months of December 2007 and January 2008. A semi-structured interview guide consisting of six (6) open-ended questions was used. I sought and obtained permission of the participants to tape record the interviews which were conducted both in Sesotho and English, depending on the preference of the participants.

Each interview took approximately one to one-and-half hours. I personally typed a verbatim transcription of the data for all the interviews, coded it, and then read it repeatedly in order to come up categories that emanated from the data. The reporting of the results included, amongst others, descriptive narrative, direct quotations from the interview data, and the use of tables.

Discussion of the Results

The discussion of the results is divided into the following headings: the nature and scope of daily hassle stress experiences by the part-time adult learners, feelings associated with the experiences and appraisals made by the participants, and the coping strategies adopted by the part-time adult learners.

The Nature of Daily Hassle Stress Experienced by the Part-Time Adult Learners

The data reflected that the part-time adult learners experienced three types of stress. These are *eustress* which, according to *The National Center for Health and Wellness (2002-2006)*, is a positive stress that arises when motivation and inspiration are needed; *distress* caused by the constant readjustments or alterations in their routine; and *hyperstress* in cases where the participants felt that they were pushed beyond what they can handle. Generally, the daily hassles that generated these types of stress were related to the social, economic, and academic activities. The daily hassles emanating from the social activities were mainly attached to the reproductive roles, and community maintenance activities. The reproductive roles were a daily hassle for female participants who indicated that they usually had to either wake up early in the morning in order to do some household chores before they left for work, or attend to the needs of the children in the evenings. This situation could be attributed to the gender roles as defined by the Basotho culture whereby household chores fell within the functions of women.

The community maintenance activities were identified as stressors for both male and female participants. However, the male participants did not perceive their inability to participate in community activities due to studies as negatively as the female participants. The female participants maintained that the societal pressure greatly added to their levels of stress in cases where they were not able to meet the societal expectations. This was because they felt that if they could not participate as expected by the society, no one would be there to support them in their times of need. This situation could be associated with the gender differences suggested by DuBrin (2002) that women were more likely to protect and nurture their children (tend) and turn to social networks of supportive women (befriend) when confronted with major stressors.

The economic activities that were viewed as daily hassles included travel between home and office, office work, and work-related travel. Travel between home and office was identified as a

daily hassle by participants who lived in one district and worked in another. Office work and work-related travel became a stressor for the participants in that it took up most of their time such that it created pressure for the participants in trying to accommodate the academic and social activities.

The social and economic circumstances of part-time adult learners were similar to those found by Östlund (2005) in the study of the experiences of adult learners in distance education at the Umeå University in Sweden. The study identified pressure due to insufficient time and disruptions during their studies as some of the stressors. It further established that three main areas which negatively affected studies were circumstances in the domestic lives of adult learners, circumstances in their work lives, and lack of experience with studying on a distance education mode. In the case of the part-time adult learners at Institute of Extra Mural Studies (IEMS) in Lesotho, the pressure due to insufficient time was validated by the discovery that the participants in this study generally had long days that started from 04:00 a.m. and ended at 12:00 midnight at times.

Daily hassles related to academic activities were said to emanate from face-to-face class sessions, individual study, search for study material, group work, and examinations. These activities were regarded as stressful events in that usually they clashed with either the social or economic activities, and forced the participants to make difficult choices. While it was perceived that most adult students preferred groups as a context for learning, and that learning groups can often achieve more for members than on a one-to-one situation (Rogers, 2002), group work was identified as a daily hassle that evoked stress for majority of the participants. The stressful impact of daily hassles such as search for study material, and group work seemed to be felt more by the part-time adult learners who did not reside in Maseru, that is, the district in which IEMS was situated.

The search for study material was a challenge for the learners because of the inadequacy of library resources and internet facilities at IEMS. Learners who resided in districts other than Maseru felt more challenged in that there were no libraries and internet facilities at all in their areas of

residence. Thomas (2005) named marginalization and neglect of adult learning programs as a common trend in universities (para. 1). The identified lack of study facilities or resources at IEMS could be an indicator of marginalization and neglect of the program by the university or deficiencies in the policy guiding the university operations. The university policy has to address and cater for both the nature of the program and the unique circumstances of the part-time adult learners such as geographical location. To this effect, one of the participants asked if I would make recommendations to IEMS at the end of my study. I responded in the affirmative. She then specifically requested me to include the following recommendations to IEMS:

“... kore ntho e ka bang ntle haholo bakeng sa rona baithuti bana ba kantle, mona moo ba nang le li-regional centre tsa bona, bonyane ho be le li-library hape. Ho ka ba betere ... U fumana hore mohlomong ho na le libukanyana tseo u reng ha u na tloha koana u tlo kalima buka mona hohang”.

The above recommendation is for IEMS to establish libraries at its regional centers. This would reduce the need for the adult learners who lived in other districts to travel to Maseru just to borrow library books.

“Ache, le eona ena ea libuka tsena tse sebelisoang e re stressa hore! Material ana ao re a sebelisang ache, a morao haholo ka lilemo ... Ho batla hore ho ke ho up-datoe libuka tsena ho ikamahanyoe le ntho tsa morao-rao”.

The translation of the above recommendation is that there was also a need for IEMS to update the study material that has been designed for the program such that it incorporates current literature.

Another factor which exposed the learners to daily hassle stress academically was the lack of supportive structures to protect the learners from victimization and the general negative attitude of the members of staff at IEMS.

The Feelings and Appraisals of the Experiences of the Participants

Individual feelings are closely related to the appraisals of situations that individuals are confronted with. Appraisals are perceived to be critical in the development of stress. Stage three (3) of Milner and Palmer's (1998) Integrative-Transactional model of stress has propounded that stress is triggered if the situation is appraised as threatening. Consequently, the feelings, which are a response to a situation could be said to be determined by one's appraisal made to a situation. Furthermore, appraisals are distinguished as central to subsequent effort to manage the stressful situation (Taylor et al., 2006).

In this study, the feelings experienced by the participants in carrying out the daily activities include the feelings of inadequacy, sadness, anger, fear, anxiety, and potency. These feelings were induced by the appraisal of the social, economic, and academic responsibilities of the part-time adult learners as very demanding. The literature review has identified concerns over the future security, time pressure, work pressure, household problems, concerns over oneself, financial responsibility, and environmental problems as components of daily hassle scale (McDowell, 2000). The foregoing concerns were recognized by the participants in this study as triggers of the feelings that they experienced. Despite the negative feelings that were expressed by the participants, potency came out as a positive feeling that helped the participants to continue with their studies.

The Coping Strategies Adopted by the Part-Time Adult Learners

The mechanisms that helped the participants to manage stress comprised social support, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, relaxation techniques, and medical help. Social support was the strategy that was mostly used by the participants. This could be attributed to the indigenous ways of coping with challenges in the African context which involved seeking advice from the elders, amongst others. According to Ralebitso (1994) "a westerner [sic] is conditioned by culture to be self-reliant and in control of his/her life, whereas an African is conditioned to look up

to and seek elders' support (p. 71). The significance that has been placed on social support suggests the need to further explore the kind of social support that the learners receive as well as the implications of the support to their personal development. For example, the social support received by the part-time learners could either promote their personal growth or dependency.

Emotion-focused coping was the second popularly used mechanism. However, I felt that there was need to further explore the effectiveness of the emotion-focused coping alluded to by the participants. This is because a lot of anger and frustration was expressed by the participants verbally and non-verbally during the interviews as the participants mentioned their decision to ignore stressful situations. Acceptance appeared to be most commonly used emotion-focused strategy. It is a strategy that is said to relieve stress when there is chronic disparity between experience and expectations. However, acceptance is viewed as rarely complete except in children, hence resolution by this approach is rarely complete (Stress [medicine], para. 3).

Moreover, the literature review has revealed that emotion-focused coping involved efforts to regulate or work through one's emotional reactions to the stressful event (Stanton, Kirk, Cameron, & Danoff-Burg in Taylor et al., 2006) such that one is not negatively affected. In the case of the participants, I sensed that the participants could have only ignored or avoided and not accepted their situation and regulated their emotions. This was reflected by their anger and frustration over the stressful situations. Caution should, therefore, be exercised to distinguish between emotion-focused coping and avoidant coping methods resulting in maladaptive behavior which could have a negative impact on the personal growth of an individual. The tendency to either ignore or avoid stressful situations while individuals were hurting was not surprising, given that a study by Mokenela (2003) revealed that the Basotho culture promoted the culture of silence in cases where the part-time adult learners at IEMS felt oppressed or unfairly treated.

Problem-focused solving was another strategy that was used by the participants to manage stress. However, the strategy was mainly used outside the academic setting, that is, in the social and economic setting. With regard to the academic setting, the participants maintained that they could expose themselves to victimization by the adult educators and facilitators if they were to express their concerns. This perception to some extent substantiated the observation by Callacher et al in Askham (2008) regarding the “importance of friends and peers and a general tendency to seek support from one’s social milieu rather than from within the ‘alien culture’ of higher education” (p. 95). The reluctance of the part-time adult learners to apply their problem-focused coping skills in their learning environment creates an impression that the environment is not conducive to learning. Billington (1996) has advocated for environments that are conducive to learning in order to maximize effective adult learning. These include environments where students feel safe and supported, and the environments where faculty treats adult students as peers, that is, accepted and respected as intelligent experienced adults whose opinions are listened to, honored, and appreciated.

Relaxation techniques that were used by the part-time adult learners include reading, sleeping, listening to music, watching television or video, physical exercise, and gardening. Lastly, medical help was also perceived as a strategy to manage stress.

The content analysis of the interview data indicated that the participants ranked social support as a highly effective way of managing stress. The support was mostly sought from significant others (immediate family members), colleagues, friends, and social support groups that existed in some areas. Emotion-focused coping was ranked second to social support in effectiveness, followed by problem-focused coping and relaxation techniques which were rated as equal. The use of medical help was viewed as effective by only one out of the six participants. In this regard, it came up as the least effective strategy employed by the part-time adult learners at IEMS.

While it is appreciated that the part-time adult learners used some strategies that they perceived to be effective in dealing with stress, western based counseling interventions in coping with daily hassle stress could also be explored. These interventions could complement and supplement the stress management strategies that were already in place. In particular, in cases where the participants resorted to emotion-focused coping due to lack of control over their situations, the western counseling approaches could help the participants to differentiate between regulating one's emotional reactions to stressful situations and ignoring a situation while one remained angry and frustrated.

This study has discovered that the part-time adult learners are confronted with numerous daily hassles within their social, economic, and academic environment. The said challenge evoked stress which negatively affected the performance and productivity of the learners in all the environments. This situation calls for urgent counseling interventions to help the learners to deal effectively with the daily hassle stress. According to Taylor et al. (2006) "some colleges and universities have instituted programs to help students cope with these stressful events by learning stress management techniques" (p. 458). They further maintained that through such programs, students began to realize that acquisition of appropriate stress management techniques could help them to experience stressful events as less so. These observations validate the need for counseling services in higher education.

Currently, counseling services are not readily available to the part-time adult learners at IEMS in the sense that the learners have to travel to the main campus of the National University of Lesotho in Roma (35 km away from Maseru) in order to access such services. Accessing such services may not be possible, given their tight schedule and diverse geographical locations of the learners. Consequently, there is a need to have at least one counselor based at IEMS (Maseru

campus) in order to help the part-time adult learners to cope more effectively with their unique and diverse issues.

Summary of the findings

The summary of the findings are discussed under the four themes that emerged from this study. These are that part-time adult learners are constantly under time pressure; are burdened with financial responsibilities; are challenged by differences in personalities and attitudes; and they develop resilience to stress.

Theme 1: Constantly under Time Pressure

The part-time adult learners in higher education performed numerous activities on a daily basis ranging from social, economic, and academic tasks. The learners generally had long days of about eighteen (18) hours (i.e., 04:00 am to 12:00 midnight) in order for them to accommodate all the activities. The identified daily hassles were related to reproductive roles, productive roles, social maintenance roles, and academic roles such as attending face-to-face class sessions, individual study, search for study material, and group work.

The constant time pressure on the part-time adult learners to achieve the numerous tasks exposed them to feelings associated with stress. These were feelings of inadequacy, sadness, anger, uncertainty, fear, and anxiety. Generally, the effects of daily hassle stress were felt more by the participants who lived in districts other than Maseru where the study centre is situated.

Theme 2: Burdened with Financial Responsibilities

The part-time adult learners have added financial obligations in that, other than maintaining and sustaining their nuclear families, they also incur expenses that are related to their academic responsibilities. The financial pressure was mainly associated with travel from one district to the other for purposes of attending classes, attending group meetings, and search for study material. Other costs involved communication, hiring of equipment to use for study purposes, and payment of

services such as the internet, which were not readily available either at the study centre or in some geographical area.

Theme 3: Challenges Posed by Personalities and Attitudes

One of the stressors for the part-time adult learners was the need to deal with and to cope with different personalities, negative attitudes of their colleagues, and negative attitudes of some of the members of staff at IEMS. Group work is one of the commonly used teaching methods at IEMS and its effectiveness relies on cooperation amongst group members as well as good team spirit. This study has revealed that there was lack of cooperation and team spirit in some of the groups. This situation was a source of frustration and a barrier to effective learning which negatively affected the performance of the learners. The conflicts in groups were attributed to differences in attitudes and the political inclinations of the learners in some cases. In addition, the negative attitudes of some of the members of staff at IEMS, and their lack of cooperation along with limited support to learners generated stress for the part-time adult learners.

Theme 4: Development of Resilience to Stress

The part-time adult learners had challenges that exposed them to daily hassle stress that even affect their performance in school negatively. However, the learners generally develop resilience that helps them to continue with their education despite all odds. The resilience of the part-time learners was primarily boosted by the coping mechanisms that they employed. These mechanisms include social support, emotion-focused coping, problem-focused coping, relaxation techniques, and medical help. These identified strategies were viewed as effective in reducing stress, at varying levels, such that the learners continued to function reasonably within their social, economic, and academic contexts. Social support was the strategy that was mainly used by the participants, while medical help was rarely sought.

Lastly, factors such as gender, marital status, and geographical location seemed to have an influence on the experiences, perceptions, feelings, and attitudes of the part-time adult learners. I, therefore, conclude that these factors have an effect on part-time adult learning. Further studies to determine the impact of these factors on the performance of the learners are recommended.

Recommendations

The following recommendations, based on the findings of the study of the experiences of part-time adult learners in higher education and the coping strategies that they adopted, are made to the policy makers and implementers in institutions of higher learning that run partial or full distance education programs and specifically, the National University of Lesotho; adult learners in both part-time and full-time programs; and the theory and practice of counseling.

Policy Makers and Implementers in Institutions of Higher Learning

1. Review of policy to incorporate the uniqueness of the part-time adult education program.
2. Establishment of libraries or resource centers that are equipped with computers at all the regional centers of IEMS
3. Review of study material designed for the part-time adult education program at IEMS

Adult Learners in both Part-Time and Full-Time Programs

1. Exploration of use of western-based counseling interventions in coping with daily hassle stress

The Theory and Practice of Counseling

1. At least one professional counselor should be based at IEMS (Maseru campus) in order to help the part-time adult learners to cope more effectively with their unique and diverse issues.

Recommendations for Further Research

1. Exploration of the social support received by the part-time adult learners at IEMS as well as the implications of such support to their personal development.
2. A study of the impact of factors such as gender, geographical location, and marital status on part-time adult learning.

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Appendices

Appendix A

Semi-structured Interview Guide

PROJECT TITLE: Daily Hassles Stress and Stress Coping Strategies: The Experience of Part-Time Adult Learners in Higher Education

- 1) What social, economic, and academic activities do you normally perform on a daily basis?
- 2) How can you describe the feelings that you experience as you perform these roles?
- 3) Under what circumstances/situations do you experience such feelings?
- 4) Which of the activities do you find to be most stressful to you?
- 5) How do you normally deal with stress?
- 6) Do you find your way of dealing with stress identified in (5) to be effective?

Appendix B

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Botswana.

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Email: mokenela_pj@yahoo.com

November 20, 2007

The Head of Department
Adult Education Department
National University of Lesotho
P.O. Roma. 180.
Lesotho.

Dear Mrs. Semoko,

Re: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT RESEARCH

I am a Masters student in Counseling and Human Services at the University of Botswana (UB). As a requirement to fulfill the program, I am currently carrying out a research study on daily hassles encountered by part-time adult learners in higher education and coping strategies that they adopt. The study is intended to come up with recommendations for improvement of existing learners support structures in institutions of higher education. It is further intended to inform policy decisions as well as lecturers, counselors, and adult learners in higher education about the experiences of adult learners with a view to facilitate implementation of change where necessary.

The focus of the study is on the experiences of part-time adult learners in higher education. The input of such learners in this study is invaluable as it will provide knowledge and understanding regarding the experiences, views, and opinions of the adult learners. The information disclosed by the learners will be treated as confidential and used for the sole purpose of this study. Upon completion of the study, the researcher will share the findings of the study with your department and other relevant bodies. I, therefore, humbly request authorization to draw the sample of my study from your department.

I look forward to your assistance in this regard.

Paballo MOKENELA (Mrs)

Appendix C

Block 417B/30
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Private Bag 00706
GABORONE.
Botswana.

Telephone: 393 5859
Mobile: 71339261

November 20, 2007

Dear Sir/Madam,

Re: INVITATION TO PARTICIPATE IN THE STUDY ENTITLED – DAILY-HASSLE STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES: THE EXPERIENCE OF PART-TIME ADULT LEARNERS IN HIGHER EDUCATION

I am a student at the University of Botswana pursuing a Masters degree in Counseling and Human Services. Currently, I am carrying out a study to identify daily hassles encountered by part-time adult learners in higher education and the coping mechanisms adopted by such learners. The study is intended to inform policy decision-makers as well as lecturers, counselors, and adult learners in higher education with a view to facilitate improvement of existing learner support structures in institutions of higher education.

You have been purposefully selected to participate in an interview. Your input in this study is invaluable as it will provide knowledge and understanding regarding the experiences, views, and opinions of adult learners in higher education. I, therefore, humbly request you to spare some of your time to attend an interview related to this study at a time that might be suitable to you. The interview will take about an hour. The information that you will provide will only be used for purposes of research and it will be held in strict confidence. Your identity will also not be disclosed to any other person. The interview will be recorded, with your consent, for purposes of accuracy of information and minimization of disruption that could be caused by note taking. Upon completion of the study, you will have access to the findings of the study.

I thank you in advance for your anticipated participation in the study.

Paballo MOKENELA (Mrs)

Appendix D

CONSENT TO PARTICIPATE IN A RESEARCH STUDY

TITLE: Daily-Hassle Stress and Coping Strategies: The Experience of Part-time Adult Learners in Higher Education.

RESEARCHER: Paballo Mokenela
Block 417B/30
University of Botswana
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GABORONE. Botswana.

Please tick () in the space provided to confirm the following:

- I confirm that I understand the purpose of the study and what is being requested of me. ()
- I understand that the interview will be recorded and transcribed, and that I will have an opportunity to check the interview transcription for accuracy. ()
- I understand that the information will only be used for purposes of this study. ()
- I understand that all information will be safeguarded to ensure confidentiality, and I will remain anonymous ()
- I understand that my participation is voluntary and that I am free to withdraw anytime. In such an event, my data will be excluded from the analysis, and withdrawal will not affect my future professional relationship with the researcher. ()
- Based on my understanding of the foregoing, I certify that I am willing to take part in the above research study. ()

Participant Date Signature

Researcher Date Signature

Appendix E

RESEARCH TITLE: Daily-Hassle Stress and Coping Strategies: The Experience of Part-time Adult Learners in Higher Education.

PARTICIPANT'S BIOGRAPHICAL DATA

Code Number: _____

Gender: _____

Age: 25 – 29 years ()

30 – 34 years ()

35 – 39 years ()

40 – 44 years ()

45 – 49 years ()

50 years and above ()

Marital Status: Single ()

Married ()

Widowed ()

Separated ()

Divorced ()

Cohabiting ()

Number of Children (if any): _____

Number of Dependents (other than own children, if any): _____

Occupation: _____

Place of Residence: _____