

<b>7</b>	<b>CHAPTER SEVEN: EVALUATION OF STRESS EXPERIENCED BY THE FEMALE PARTICIPANTS IN THE PRIMARY AND SECONDARY EDUCATIONAL MILIEUS</b>	<b>235</b>
<b>7.1</b>	<b>INTRODUCTION</b>	<b>237</b>
<b>7.2</b>	<b>SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>7.2.1.</b>	<b>What is stress?</b>	<b>238</b>
<b>7.2.2</b>	<b>Did the female participants in past primary and secondary milieus experience stress?</b>	<b>239</b>
<b>7.2.3</b>	<b>If females in the past did experience stress, when and why did the problem originate?</b>	<b>240</b>
<b>7.2.4</b>	<b>What are the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms with regard to stress, experienced by female participants in the past primary and secondary educational milieus?</b>	<b>241</b>
<b>7.2.4.1</b>	<b>Causes of stress</b>	<b>241</b>
(i)	<i>Female oppression</i>	241
(ii)	<i>Females overburdened with responsibilities</i>	243
(iv)	<i>Female physiology</i>	243
(v)	<i>Denial of natural and nurtured femininity</i>	244
<b>7.2.4.2</b>	<b>Manifestations of stress</b>	<b>245</b>
(i)	<i>Emotional manifestations</i>	245
(ii)	<i>Behavioural manifestations</i>	246
(iii)	<i>Cognitive manifestations</i>	246
(iv)	<i>Physical manifestations</i>	246
<b>7.2.4.3</b>	<b>Coping mechanisms</b>	<b>247</b>
(i)	<i>Positive appraisal of female identity</i>	248
(ii)	<i>Finding inner peace</i>	249
(iii)	<i>Health management</i>	250
(iv)	<i>Communication</i>	250
(v)	<i>Maladaptive mechanisms</i>	250
<b>7.2.5</b>	<b>Do female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus suffer from stress?</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>7.2.6</b>	<b>What are the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms with regard to stress experienced by the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus</b>	<b>251</b>
<b>7.2.6.1</b>	<b>Causes of stress</b>	<b>251</b>
(i)	<i>Female oppression</i>	252
(ii)	<i>Females overburdened with responsibilities</i>	252
(iii)	<i>Female physiology</i>	252

(iv)	<i>Denial of natural and nurtured female identity</i>	252
<b>7.2.6.2</b>	<b>Manifestations of stress</b>	253
<b>7.2.6.3</b>	<b>Coping mechanisms</b>	253
(i)	<i>Positive appraisal of female identity</i>	253
(ii)	<i>Finding inner peace</i>	254
(iii)	<i>Health management</i>	254
(iv)	<i>Communication</i>	254
(v)	<i>Maladaptive coping mechanisms</i>	254
<b>7.2.7</b>	<b>What are the similarities and differences regarding stress experienced by the female participants in the present and past primary and secondary educational milieus?</b>	255
<b>7.2.8</b>	<b>Do the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus suffer more from stress than in the past?</b>	257
<b>7.3</b>	<b>Recommendations</b>	258
<b>7.3.1</b>	<b>Recommendations regarding the contemporary primary educational milieu</b>	259
<b>7.3.2</b>	<b>Recommendations regarding the contemporary secondary educational milieu</b>	259
<b>7.3.3</b>	<b>Specific female stress management programmes for children and adults in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus</b>	259
<b>7.3.3.1</b>	<b>Awareness of the need to perceive natural female identity in a positive light</b>	262
<b>7.3.3.2</b>	<b>Relaxation techniques</b>	263
<b>7.3.3.3</b>	<b>Health management</b>	263
<b>7.3.3.4</b>	<b>Communication</b>	264
<b>7.4</b>	<b>CONCLUDING REMARKS</b>	266

## 7.1 INTRODUCTION

As the researcher pointed out in chapter one, stress is a contemporary problem that was systematically identified and described by the pioneer of stress research, Selye (1907-1982). Female stress is a particular problem today, although it may be a universal and eternal problem. The philosopher, Wittgenstein (1889-1951) believed that timeless factors underpin the present. Thus, female stress may depend upon contemporary female biological, psychological and social identity that may not have changed since the first human female was born.

The researcher explained in chapter one that the problem of female stress merits historical-educational analysis. It is a particular problem in contemporary times which many consider plagued by the so-called disease of stress on the one hand and on the other, an epoch where female issues such as that of empowerment and equity are still being addressed. Moreover, age-old female natural identity as nurturers makes women and girls valuable participants in primary and secondary educational milieus. Thus, there is need to discover a solution to female diathesis to stress that is not peculiar to contemporary Westernised society. In fact, historical-educational research may provide a solution that could be actualised in future educational milieus.

In Chapters Two to Six, the researcher examined the stress experienced by women and girls in prehistoric hunter-gatherer society, Graeco-Roman antiquity, medieval Europe, the Western world from 1750-1950 and contemporary Western and traditional indigenous South African society. The survey explored stressors facing women and girls in the educational present and past, manifestations of stress and coping mechanisms with the aim of discovering generally valid essentials leading to solution to the problem.

Stress experienced by female participants in the past and present primary and secondary educational milieus was and is a universal problem exacerbated by the biopsychosocial vulnerability that the researcher outlined in Chapter One (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1 [iii]) and featured in each of the chapters that followed this one. However, although eternal biopsychosocial factors may have underpinned and still underpin the stress experienced by women and girls in the past and present, there were and are specific time-related stressors. The researcher described a few possible causes of stress in Chapters Two to Six where she also outlined some manifestations of female stress in the past and present. This suggests that it was and is indeed still a problem. Nevertheless, despite their experience of negative stress, women

and girls did and do attempt to cope via various stress-coping mechanisms that researcher described in Chapters Two to Six.

## 7.2 SOLUTION TO THE PROBLEM

The historic-educational investigation of the past six chapters was an attempt to present data as comprehensively and concisely as possible for a topic of a very wide scope. The ultimate aim was to gain enough insight to answer the following questions regarding the problem of stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus:

- What is *stress*?
- Did the female participants in past primary and secondary milieus suffer from stress?
- If so, when and why did the problem originate?
- What were the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms, with regard to stress, experienced by the female participants in the past primary and secondary educational milieus?
- Do the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus, suffer from stress?
- What are the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms with regard to stress, experienced by the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus?
- What are the similarities and differences regarding stress experienced by the female participants in the present and past primary and secondary educational milieus?
- Do female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus suffer more from stress than in the past?
- What recommendations can be made for the future of education regarding the empowerment of women and girls participating in the formal and informal learning situation to cope successfully with stress?

The researcher will now attempt to provide answers to these questions based on the retrospective survey as discussed in the research report.

### 7.2.1. What is stress?

The researcher examined the key concept of *stress* in paragraph 1.3. A term derived from Latin and used in Middle English 14<sup>th</sup> century to denote distress, *stress* became a scientific term in the late 17<sup>th</sup> century used to denote pressure. However, contemporary society also uses the term to

describe an affective disorder characterized by feelings of tension and pressure. In paragraph 1.2.3.1, the researcher explained the stress models: the stimulus model that describes stress in terms of external stressors or causes of stress; the response model that focuses on the individual's stress reaction that initially involves an automatic physiological and emotional state of arousal but if prolonged, manifests as physical, emotional and behavioural stress disorders; and the transactional model that accounts for the individual's stress reaction as determined by various factors and not only dependent on the nature of stressors and stress physiology. The researcher pointed out in paragraph 1.2.3.1 (iii) that gender-related social, biological and psychological differences might determine the stress vulnerability experienced by many females. In paragraph 1.2.3.2, the researcher explained that stressors might be experienced at macro-level in society and culture; at meso-level in the informal and formal educational milieu; and micro-level in the individual self. In paragraph 1.2.3.3, various emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural manifestations of stress were listed. In paragraph 1.2.3.4, the researcher briefly mentioned the matter of stress management. She indicated the need for education to be involved in research and the development of this solution to the problem of stress experienced by women and girls in particular.

### **7.2.2 Did the female participants in past primary and secondary milieus experience stress?**

Possible manifestations of stress were listed in chapter one (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.3). A few of these were noted with regard to particular epochs in chapters two to six. Although more research could be done regarding these manifestations, research of this scope could only describe a few examples to illustrate that females in the past did manifest some emotional, behavioural, physical and cognitive stress disorders listed in chapter one (Cf. paragraphs 2.3, 3.3, 4.3). These examples suggest that women and girls involved in family life where individuals learn to become adults informally, as well as those participating in more formal educational milieus, experienced stress. However, these female stress manifestations probably depended on various factors including the universally and eternally present female sociopsychobiological stress diathesis and stressors related to these timeless dynamics or particular to the epoch.

### **7.2.3 If females in the past did experience stress, when and why did the problem originate?**

The problem of female stress originated with the first female who was psychobiologically designed to produce the automatic stress response when faced by stressors. However, due to various factors including female biopsychosocial stress vulnerability, she was unable to ‘burn off’ excess stress hormones and return to a natural state of homeostasis (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1 [ii]). Thus, still under stress, the woman or girl participant in the informal or formal educational milieu of early society like her descendants in ancient, medieval, industrial and contemporary society may have manifested symptoms of distress with which she would try to cope with varying degrees of success.

Like their descendants, early females may have been vulnerable to stress because of their biological, psychological and social role as nurturer. As stated in paragraph 1.2.3.3 (iii) of this research the level of various stress and sex hormones and brain chemicals can contribute to female stress proneness. Moreover, genetic factors play a role as do gender differences in the nature of physical diseases experienced. Gender related psychological factors predispose females to stress that were probably evident in early females. Paragraph 1.2.3.3 (iii) explained some of these psychological tendencies.

It is possible that female biological and psychological traits that predispose them to stress could be due to social factors. From earliest times, women and girls have been regarded as second-class citizens. This negative social perception of femaleness may have, thus, been responsible for female psychological and biochemical vulnerability. Low status lowers serotonin levels that in turn cause women and girls to become more stressed, submissive and collude in their own oppression leading to further stress.

Since a negative social perception of femaleness may have underpinned the early female stress experience, a change of attitude to a positive perception of this role may have grounded successful coping with stress. If this is true, then the same may be said of generations of females who followed in the footsteps of early women and girls. In other words, despite the possibility of stressors’ being particular to eras and cultures, the female stress response throughout history might be related to factors of female biopsychosocial vulnerability to stress evident in early females. This could have been possibly transmitted to future generations of women and girls who remained essentially unchanged from a psychological, biological and social perspective. Moreover, stressors that faced early females were often due to a negative

perception of the female identity that makes women and girls vulnerable to pressure in the first place. This negative and oppressive perception exacerbated their already difficult position (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1 [iii]).

#### **7.2.4 What are the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms with regard to stress, experienced by female participants in the past primary and secondary educational milieus?**

##### **7.2.4.1 Causes of stress**

According to the *stimulus* model, there are particular causes for stress, an affective disorder typified by feelings of tension and pressure (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1[i]). Indeed, life events and daily problems faced both women and girls throughout the ages, who were vulnerable to stress for physical, psychological and social reasons rooted in their natural and nurtured identity as potential bearers of children, nurturers of the young and sometimes carers of older people. Moreover, this identity was often viewed negatively and as the study has attempted to show, stressors are often grounded in a negative and oppressive perception of the natural and customary female biological, social and psychological role.

In the context of each society and era reviewed in this research, female participants in educational milieus had to endure various stressors at macro, meso and micro-level. These were described in the previous chapters along with explanations of manifestations and coping strategies. Many stressors were rooted in female bio psychosocial identity as bearers and carers of other members of society, although they may have appeared contextualised in conditions prevalent at the time. In the following paragraphs the researcher will attempt to trace the commonalities between the different stressors that faced women and girls of the societies reviewed. In other words, she will explain the essential, eternal and universal factors in which many time-related stressors are grounded.

##### **(i) *Female oppression***

All past eras reviewed in this project experienced female suppression, oppression, discrimination, marginalisation and low esteem at macro, meso and micro-level. During prehistoric times, female social status was low; women and girls were excluded from prestigious tasks and marginalized during rituals. Female life was considered dispensable, female gathering was considered inferior to male hunting and there were no initiation rites of passage for girls

(Cf. paragraphs 2.2.1.1, 2.2.1.4, 2.2.1.5, 2.2.1.6, 2.2.1.7, 2.2.2.8). Female oppression led to a negative and unrealistic self-concept. Females experienced a conflicting physical self-image; they lacked an individual sense of identity and had a low self-esteem (Cf. paragraphs 2.2.3.5, 2.2.3.6, 2.2.3.7). Moreover, marriage was stressful because early women and girls had no say regarding choice of partner. During ancient Greek and Roman times, particular pressure was placed on females during times of disaster, yet they had no public status or political rights (Cf. paragraphs 3.2.1.1 –3.2.1.3). Females were controlled and isolated by men in society and the family, their contribution was belittled and they had no say with regard to choice of marital partner (Cf. paragraphs 3.2.1.4 - 3.2.1.6, 3.2.2.2, 3.2.2.4). Moreover, they were oppressed, placed under duress and even treated harshly for example in religious life, in the educational milieu, in the marriage relationship or when punished for misdemeanours (Cf. paragraphs 3.2.1.7, 3.2.1.8, 3.2.2.1, 3.2.2.4, 3.2.2.5). As in the case of prehistoric females, this oppression led to low self-esteem and a lack of assertiveness in females during the age of antiquity. They denied their feelings, did not perceive themselves in a positive and realistic light, remained helpless and lacked individual identity formation (Cf. 3.2.3.1, 3.2.3.2, 3.2.3.3, 3.2.3.10). Medieval women and girls were also considered socially, legally and spiritually inferior to males and not worthy of the same education as males (4.2.1.3, 4.2.1.4, 4.2.1.5, 4.2.2.5). They were often brutally treated and persecuted as witches for example, as well as having to endure uncomfortable domestic conditions, frustration in their maternal role and severely harsh punishment (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.1.6, 4.2.2.3, 4.2.2.4, 4.2.2.7). In addition, medieval women and girls were cloistered in nunneries. They were similarly limited at a cognitive and emotional level with regard to adequate self-actualisation. There was no transitional period between girlhood and womanhood; females were not allowed to develop an individual identity; they were expected to fulfil multiple and often conflicting roles; they lacked freedom as individuals and were often frustrated in their intellectual and moral growth (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.3.5, 4.2.3.6, 4.2.3.7, 4.2.3.8, 4.2.3.9). Females of the Industrial Era were also oppressed. They were victims of a discriminatory legal system and medical ignorance regarding female health. Female orphans were particularly oppressed and girls were under pressure to marry, have children and work as servants. Moreover, they were generally excluded from the secondary educational milieu and had a low self-esteem (Cf. paragraphs 5.2.1.3, 5.2.1.8, 5.2.2.7, 5.2.2.8, 5.2.2.11, 5.2.3.4).

In paragraph 1.2.3.1 (iii), the researcher explained how the factor of female vulnerability to stress influences the individual's response to a stressor. In light of this data, the researcher believes that years of female oppression may have contributed to female psychological vulnerability in the form of lack of assertiveness and a tendency to dwell on feelings of mental

pain. Moreover, experience of oppression over time may have caused continual female social vulnerability as bearers of many burdens.

(ii) *Females overburdened with responsibilities*

Oppression led to females in the past being overburdened with work and expectations. Early hunter-gatherer females were burdened with the workload and subservient role that came along with their female reproductive and domestic role. Females had a heavy domestic workload, were responsible for bringing up the children and had insufficient leisure time (Cf. paragraphs 2.2.2.1, 2.2.2.2, 2.2.2.6, 2.2.2.7, 2.2.3.3). Not all females in the ancient world were burdened with domestic chores. For example, upper-class females had many servants and slaves. However, even these privileged women and girls were expected to produce male heirs and citizens of the state (Cf. paragraph 3.2.3.4, 3.2.2.8, 3.2.2.9). Moreover, despite their second-class status, severe pressures were placed on females during the Dark Ages during times of war and disease regarding duties as healers, nurturers, homemakers and members of female religious orders (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.1.1, 4.2.1.2, 4.2.2.1, 4.2.2.2, 4.2.2.6). Females during the era 1750-1950 were burdened with domestic responsibilities and experienced infant mortality, the death of family members, absence from children, work-related strain, frequent pregnancy and childbirth and the wearing of burdensome clothing during most of the era (Cf. paragraphs 5.2.2.1, 5.2.2.2, 5.2.2.6, 5.2.2.9, 5.2.3.1, 5.2.3.2, 5.2.3.3).

In paragraph 1.2.3.1 (iii), the researcher explained how the factor of female vulnerability to stress influences the individual's response to a stressor. In light of this data, the researcher believes that years of experiencing the burden of many responsibilities contributed to female social vulnerability in the form of a continual expectation to endure the brunt of domestic and family responsibilities. Moreover, experiencing so many social expectations over the millennia may have contributed to continual female physical vulnerability as bearers of children and other mental and physical strains that negatively affect the female body.

(iii) *Female physiology*

Females of the past eras surveyed in this research were victims of female physiology. Early women and girls were physically vulnerable to attack and disease. In addition, their lives were controlled by their reproductive biology and psychology (2.2.3.1, 2.2.3.2, 2.2.3.8). The physical identity of women and girls in antiquity was often a debilitating cause of stress, more than during prehistoric times when women and girls were possibly more physically healthy and

stronger (Cf. paragraph 3.2.3.6, 3.2.3.9). Moreover, medical interventions were probably more harmful than helpful (Cf. paragraph 3.2.3.7). Female reproductive physical identity was a particular cause of stress at micro-level (Cf. paragraphs 3.2.3.4, 3.2.3.5, 3.2.3.8).

Medieval females had to frequently undergo physical mutilation, gender-related taboos, stifling or distorting clothing and sexual abuse in an epoch that undermined natural sexuality and especially female sexuality (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.3.1, 4.2.3.2, 4.2.3.3, 4.2.3.4). Industrial era females experienced the physical strain of work overload, frequent pregnancy and childbirth and the wearing of burdensome clothing during most of the era (Cf. 5.2.3.1, 5.2.3.2, 5.2.3.3).

(iv) *Denial of natural and nurtured femininity*

Another similarity in the nature of stressors that faced females in the past is that they were at times forced to behave contrary to their natural feminine nature. Prehistoric females were expected to be subservient to male decrees in society and in the family, even if it meant going against their natural feminine instincts. They became destructive to their own kind and fought with males in a struggle for power and acceptance by a male dominated society (Cf. paragraph 2.2.1.2, 2.2.1.3). They were forced to neglect their children at times, to commit infanticide and to be involved with abortions. They were compelled to move frequently in search of better hunting ground and had to avoid pregnancy and childbirth (2.2.2.3, 2.2.2.4, 2.2.2.5, 2.2.3.4). On the one hand, women and girls in antiquity were under pressure to produce male heirs and educate their small children. On the other, they were expected to deny their maternal instincts and cope with infanticide, child abuse, infant illness and mortality especially in case of female children (3.2.2.6, 3.2.2.7, 3.2.2.8, 3.2.3.9). Female sexual identity was stifled during the Middle Ages that revered a cloistered female life of chastity in nunneries. Medieval females often had to undergo thwarted motherhood, sexual mutilation, sexually related taboos and stifling or bodily distorting clothing (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.2.4, 4.2.3.1, 4.2.3.2, 4.2.3.3, 4.2.3.4). Women and girls during the era 1750-1950 saw traditional perceptions of femaleness change along with urbanisation. They were no longer as isolated and cloistered as their female ancestors. They experienced the pain and pleasure of urban and industrial milieus (Cf. 5.2.1.1, 5.2.2.2, 5.2.2.3). For example, they were workers in factories, exposed to urban crime and technology and travelled the world or learnt about distant places in the world (Cf. 5.2.2.2, 5.2.2.3, 5.2.2.4, 5.2.1.4, 5.2.3.5, 5.2.1.7). They played a role in wars, aspired to careers and political rights, although they had to see this fight for liberty as intervention into a male world (Cf. 5.2.2.2, 5.2.1.2 5.2.2.8). . The world of work and public status were not viewed in female terms. Females who invaded or succeeded in the world of men most probably perceived themselves as

abandoning their traditional female role. However, not all instances of contradicting their female instincts were time-related and new. The age-old stressors of infant mortality, the death of beloved family and friends and absence from children would have contributed to the stress experienced by females during the Industrial Era.

#### **7.2.4.2 Manifestations of stress**

The researcher described a few manifestations of female stress in this research. Further research should explore this topic more extensively. However, many manifestations of female stress in the past were noted in other sections of the chapters. Some stressors at micro-level and even certain coping mechanisms described could also be perceived as manifestations of stress. For instance, many females turned to various substances for stress relief during the Industrial Era. Not only did they drink or eat various concoctions, they may have abused beauty products. Even shopping may have been a coping mechanism, as well as a behavioural manifestation of stress and an eventual stressor for these females. Thus, these maladaptive coping mechanisms became manifestations and possible stressors (Cf. paragraphs 5.4.1, 5.4.2, 5.4.6, 5.4.17, 5.4.18). In the light of this argument, one could classify many coping mechanisms described in this research as manifestations of stress. For example, in ancient times, the wearing of charms and jewellery to find stress relief could be perceived as a behavioural manifestation of stress (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.6, 2.4.19).

##### *(i) Emotional manifestations*

In chapter two, the researcher mentioned a few emotional manifestations of stress experienced by women and girls in contemporary hunter-gatherer society that probably resembles past prehistoric society. Examples were feelings of hopelessness and anxiety (Cf. paragraphs 2.3.1-2.3.5). Like females in early society, female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus of ancient Greece and Rome manifested various symptoms of stress. Religious practices and mythology of the era revealed an awareness of symptoms of stress in females given various divine interpretations. Likewise, ancient Greek and Roman literature portrayed female stress that the medical thinking of the epoch attempted to analyse and treat. The researcher explained these different perspectives of stress responses of the time in paragraphs 3.3.1-3.3.3. Emotional manifestations of female stress in antiquity were mood swings, excessive emotional reactions and symptoms of depression (Cf. paragraphs 3.3.5, 3.3.6, 3.3.8). In chapter four, the researcher noted some manifestations of stress in medieval women and girls. The researcher described a few emotional manifestations, such as anxiety, emotional

alienation, mood swings and guilt (Cf. paragraphs 4.3.2, 4.3.3, 4.3.5, 4.3.7). Women and girls during the era 1750-1950 sometimes succumbed to the stressors that confronted them. The use of the term *distress* at the time points to the probability of stress experienced by females (Cf. paragraph 5.3.2.). Emotional disorders such as hysteria, melancholia and neurasthenia were observed and treated at the time. Many disorders were given names for what are classified differently today in psychiatric terminology (Cf. paragraphs 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.5).

(ii) *Behavioural manifestations*

In early society, behavioural manifestations such as withdrawal and shyness, frequent crying or desire to cry and aggressive behaviour appeared (Cf. paragraphs 2.3.1, 2.3.4, 2.3.5). A few examples of behavioural manifestations in females of antiquity were described in chapter three including religious rituals and representations of female stress in drama, narrative and poetry (Cf. paragraphs 3.3.1, 3.3.2). In chapter four, the researcher described behavioural manifestations of medieval females such as suicide and addictive behaviour (paragraphs 4.3.1, 4.4.4, 4.3.6). Examples of behavioural manifestations of stress during the Industrial Era were suicide, emotional overreaction and sexual promiscuity (Cf. paragraphs 5.3.1, 5.3.2, 5.3.6, 5.3.7). Substance abuse was another manifestation of stress also noted as a maladaptive coping mechanism in chapter five (Cf. paragraph 5.4.1).

(iii) *Cognitive manifestations*

The researcher did not find examples of cognitive manifestations of stress in prehistoric females. However, low self-concept and confused identity noted as a stressor at micro-level may be considered as a manifestation of stress (Cf. paragraphs 2.2.35, 2.2.36, 2.2.3.7). Examples of cognitive manifestations of female stress during antiquity were noted in chapter three. These were suicidal ideation and low self-esteem (Cf. paragraphs 3.3.4, 3.3.7). Suicidal thoughts and visions were cognitive manifestations of female stress noted in chapter four, although the latter was also viewed as a maladaptive coping mechanism (Cf. paragraph 4.3.4, 4.4.12). Low self-esteem was a cognitive manifestation of female stress during the Industrial Era and as a stressor at micro-level in chapter five (Cf. paragraph 5.2.3.4).

(iv) *Physical manifestations*

Although noted as a stressor at micro-level in chapter two, physical vulnerability and illness may have been a physical manifestation of stress in prehistoric females (Cf. paragraph 2.2.3.1).

The researcher described physical stress symptoms due to pregnancy, childbirth and other gynaecological conditions in chapter three (Cf. paragraphs 3.3.3-3.3.9). Physical manifestations of stress in medieval females were noted in chapter four (Cf. paragraph 4.3.1). Explained as a stressor at micro-level in chapter five, work related physical problems and physiological complications due to childbirth and pregnancy could be perceived as manifestations of stress in females living in the era 1750-1950 (Cf. paragraphs 5.2.3.1, 5.2.3.2).

#### **7.2.4.3 Coping mechanisms**

Past coping mechanisms for female stress varied. Some were maladaptive and became stressors or even manifestations of stress, such as substance abuse in Industrial Era females and visions in medieval females (Cf. paragraph 5.4.1, 4.4.12). However, many adaptive strategies involved attempts to alter the negative perception of females to one that saw females as worthy. Many successful coping mechanisms noted in chapter one in early female society seem to be based on a practical acceptance and positive perception of femaleness in its own right and sphere by all despite male social supremacy. This may have helped females to cope with feelings of stress as women and girls were respected for their difference, although considered unequal in status and worthy of esteem only in traditional female social zones (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.1, 2.4.20). Early society revered and worshipped natural femaleness (Cf. paragraph 2.4.5). In the ancient world, coping fundamentally involved acceptance of femininity in its own right but only within a female, primary educational and home environment marginalised from mainstream (male) society and even undermined. Ancient women and girls enjoyed acceptance of separateness, if not respect, as long as they remained within the strict parameters defined by males whether they were wives, daughters, female relatives or courtesans (Cf. paragraph 3.4.2). During the Middle Ages, females attempted positive self-appraisal in terms of accepting what was often a suffering lot in life. However, this frequently involved suppression of the female sexual self epitomized by the medieval perception of Mary, the Mother of God, immaculately conceived and conceiving without human sexual intervention (Cf. paragraph 4.4.4). Society also provided a positive perception of female identity with change in the area of female empowerment (Cf. paragraphs 4.4.1, 4.4.6, 4.4.8). Other medieval coping strategies involved the management of physical and mental health (Cf. paragraphs 4.4.3, 4.4.10, 4.4.13). As was the case during the Middle Ages, the era of great change, urbanisation and industrialisation in the Western world (1750-1950) witnessed female stress relief in the form of some social upliftment for females (5.4.4, 5.4.15) and managing physical health (5.4.4). During the Industrial Era, women and girls

coped with stress by means of various creative, ritual and relaxation activities such as music. Here they emulated their early, ancient and medieval ancestors who used similar strategies (Cf. paragraphs 5.4.11, 5.4.12, 4.4.10, 4.4.13, 3.4.4, 3.4.8, 2.4.18). However, during the Industrial Era, coping with stress was based on an attempt to perceive femaleness in a new (contrived and unnatural) light as changes were wrought during the industrial and technocratic era in Western Europe. These mostly maladaptive strategies that became stressors in themselves included Victorian dress styles, excessive feminist lobbying, use of synthetically processed medical therapies, complicated customs and etiquette and an almost obsessive quest to be perfect wives and mothers (Cf. paragraphs 5.4.1 -2, 5.4.5 – 5.4.10, 5.4.17, 5.4.18). These mechanisms were probably ominous precursors of Westernised coping styles of the contemporary post-industrial world (Cf. paragraph 6.4.10).

(i) *Positive appraisal of female identity*

Females in the past tried in various ways to perceive themselves in positively and realistically. In paragraph 7.3.1.1 (i) and paragraph 7.3.1.1 (iv), the researcher described the eternal stressor of female oppression and the feminine identity that underpinned many time-related stressors that faced females in the past. In 7.3.1.1(i) the researcher also linked the stressor of female oppression to the exacerbation of female psychological vulnerability to stress. The data gathered reveal that females in the past would have used various coping strategies to dissipate stress due to the stressor of female oppression.

In chapter two, the researcher described strategies used by early females that involved a positive perception of natural and nurtured psychobiological and social female identity. Females knew and used their power in the domestic sphere and adopted a positive perception of their marginal participation in rituals. They transformed distress into eustress and gained comfort in the knowledge of how society worshipped female fertility. They asserted their female otherness and saw the domestic sphere as a milieu of cultural growth. Moreover, they remained true to their feminine selves and avoided typically male aggressiveness. They regarded their easy transition to female adulthood positively, although greater attention was given to the initiation of boys to manhood. Consequently, women and girls developed a feminine psychology. Relief from stress was found in an awareness of society's exaltation of youthful female beauty and the knowledge of female power in matriarchal societies (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.1, 2.4.2, 2.4.3, 2.4.5, 2.4.8, 2.4.12, 2.4.13, 2.4.14, 2.4.15, 2.4.16, 2.4.20, 2.4.21).

In chapter three, the researcher described strategies used by women and girls in ancient Greece and Rome whereby they took advantage of circumstances that encouraged a positive perception of the female role in certain situations. These included the domestic sphere, upper class daily life, the world of work, law, art, drama, rituals, the educational milieu of boys and Spartan society (Cf. paragraphs 3.4.2, 3.4.3, 3.4.4, 3.4.6, 3.4.8, 3.4.9).

Medieval female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus may have resembled their prehistoric and ancient world ancestors in finding ways to perceive female identity in a positive light, although their efforts were more contrived and unnatural. For example, suffering and oppression were welcomed and received a positive cognitive appraisal. Veneration of suffering saints including the Virgin Mary and religious visionaries who practised self-abuse became a coping mechanism although possibly maladaptive. The Christian virtue of patience and acceptance of God's Will would have played a role here. However, glorifying negative perceptions of femininity as in the veneration of Virgin Mary and courtly lady lovers may have actually deepened negative female self-esteem (Cf. paragraphs 4.4.4, 4.4.12). A positive perception of femininity was gained through discovering personal independence, following female role models such as lady knights, self-respect as a marital partner, knowledge of literary praise of females and the attainment of literacy (Cf. paragraphs, 4.4.1, 4.4.4, 4.4.5, 4.4.6, 4.4.7). Coping strategies used by Industrial Era females may have raised female self-esteem such as an awareness of social reform, knowledge of female literature, awareness of female role models, access to female education and literacy (Cf. 5.4.4, 5.4.10, 5.4.13, 5.3.15).

(ii) *Finding inner peace*

Females in the past tried in various ways to find rest from stress as well as inner peace. In paragraph 7.3.3.1 (ii), the researcher described the eternal stressor of being burdened and overworked that underpinned many stressors facing women and girls over the millennia. Early hunter-gatherer females coped with this stressor with mechanisms that included passive non-resistance to society's rules and a peaceful acceptance of the status quo (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.9, 2.4.11, 2.4.17). Other practical measures to help them cope with stress supported an attitude of happiness. These involved creative pastimes such as playing music, singing and dancing, as well as making and wearing jewellery and charms (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.6, 2.4.18, 2.4.19). Females in antiquity coped through art and drama and found peace in religion, mythology and rituals (Cf. paragraphs 3.4.4, 3.4.8). Creative pastimes such as art, music and dance may have also provided stress relief (Cf. paragraphs 4.4.11, 4.4.13). Other measures would have provided stress relief in the form of music to pacify feelings of distress, relaxation practices and

the use of perfumes to calm emotions and promote feelings of self-esteem (Cf. paragraph 5.2.11, 5.2.12, 5.4.17).

(iii) *Health management*

In paragraph 7.3.1.1 (iii), the researcher described how female physiology accounted for female stress vulnerability. Females in the past found practical ways of managing female physical stress such as restricting the number of children that they had. However, this was a cause of stress at times, if they were forced to do so by other members of the tribe (2.2.4). Practical measures to reduce stress were popular in ancient times and the Middle Ages such as contraception, physical exercise and a practical knowledge of medicine (Cf. paragraphs 3.4.10, 3.4.9, 3.3.3, 4.4.2, 4.4.3, 4.4.8, 4.4.9, 4.4.10, 5.4.2). However, contraception and medical treatments could become stressors if they were inadequately practised (3.2.3.7, 3.2.3.5, 4.2.3.1, 5.2.1.8). An awareness of the need to improve nutrition may have been one of the most effective stress coping strategies that would have underpinned female stress management during the era 1750-1950 (Cf. 5.4.14).

(iv) *Communication*

Females in the past experienced social stress due to female oppression and being overburdened with tasks. This social vulnerability exacerbated their psychological vulnerability due to a lack of assertiveness and an inclination to dwell cognitively on problems (Cf. paragraph 7.3.3.1 [i]). To counteract this age-old psychological vulnerability to stress, females in the past would have found a way to communicate their feelings in female support groups. Early, ancient and Industrial Era females would have found relief from stress in this way (2.4.16, 3.4.5, 5.4.3). Although medieval life was dismal in a nunnery, it formed a support group (4.2.2.6). Group art and recreational activities would have become support groups where feelings were shared among medieval females (4.4.10, 4.4.11). An outlet for self-expression came in the form of education for some females in antiquity, the Middle Ages and the Industrial Era (3.4.7, 4.4.7, 5.3.15).

(v) *Maladaptive mechanisms*

Coping mechanisms used by females in the past included some maladaptive strategies that may have made female stress worse such as addictive behaviour, harmful contraceptive practices and certain religious practices (Cf. paragraphs 3.4.1, 3.4.10, 4.4.12, 5.4.9). Some coping

mechanisms involved wily and calculated behaviour such as controlling males by withholding services and causing domestic disputes as a power ploy (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.7 and 2.4.10). Many strategies used by Industrial Era females may have led to further stress since they may have been as unnatural and synthetic as other aspects of the era. These maladaptive mechanisms were artificial, overdone and became stressors in themselves. Examples of these strategies were substance abuse, contraceptives and abortion, rest cures, beauty and fashion devices, elaborate rituals, hypnotism and early psychoanalysis, certain religious practices and shopping (Cf. paragraphs 5.4.1, 5.4.2, 5.4.5 –5.4.8, 5.4.18).

### **7.2.5 Do female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus suffer from stress?**

Women and girls experience stress today. Uncontrollable perceptions of pressure and the inability to cope with tension comprise a contemporary female problem. Females appear to be vulnerable to stress. In chapter six, the researcher stated statistics regarding the problem of female mental health in South Africa and elsewhere in the world that appears to have worsened since 1950 (Cf. paragraph 6.1).

In chapter six of this research the researcher investigated the problem of stress experienced by women and girls in current society bearing in mind differences with regard to the Westernised and traditional female stress experience.

### **7.2.6 What are the causes, manifestations and coping mechanisms with regard to stress experienced by the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus?**

#### **7.2.6.1 Causes of stress**

##### *(i) Female oppression*

Life is often dimly oppressive for females in cultural milieus that discriminate against females. The age-old stressor of society's negative perception of females exists today in various ways. The list includes: female oppression; loss of the status traditionally granted to females; violent crime and abuse directed specifically to females; social stereotyping; poverty that seems to affect females in a particular way; witch hunts; female transgenerational stress as a result of years of oppression; lack of recognition for domestic work; gender bias in education and low self-esteem (Cf. paragraphs 6.2.1.1 – 6.2.1.7, 6.2.2.2, 6.2.2.5).

Another time-related stressor based on the eternal factor of female oppression is the frustrated actualisation of females in the workplace. Even though contemporary girls and women are raised and educated to function in the public sphere and expect equal treatment, gender inequity continues in many employment situations (Cf. paragraph 6.2.1.9). Single motherhood may be a stress peculiar to many current societies where the traditional marital and family status quo is not always maintained. This stressor is underpinned (Cf. paragraph 6.2.2.4) by negative perceptions of female identity. In addition, the presence of sexual diseases is another stressor that appears unique to contemporary society but affects females particularly owing to the age-old factor of female oppression (Cf. paragraph 6.2.3.1).

(ii) *Females overburdened with responsibilities*

Other stressors that may be unique to the era but are possibly based on eternal female vulnerability to overwork may be stress in overworked single mothers and female teachers today, in an era where universal and educational opportunities are available in much of the developed and under-developed world (Cf. paragraph 6.2.2.4, 6.2.2.6).

(iii) *Female physiology*

The eternal stressor of female biology still affects females today including maternal mortality in Third World societies in particular and abortion (cf. paragraphs 6.3.1, 6.2.2.3, 6.2.3.2). Female lives are largely controlled by reproductive biology and that makes women and girls stress-prone (Cf. paragraph 6.4.10). Moreover, in many societies female physical vulnerability leads to physical, emotional and mental abuse. This includes rape and even genital mutilation (Cf. paragraphs 6.2.1.1; 6.2.1.3). Gender stereotyping is also often linked to female physiology. Women are marginalized in the work place for example because of their so-called more delicate physical identity (Cf. paragraphs 6.2.1.4; 6.2.1.9).

(iv) *Denial of natural and nurtured female identity*

Age-old female psychological vulnerability to stress due to unassertiveness is often replaced in Westernised society by what is considered typically masculine assertive and even aggressive attitudes, feelings and behaviour. Ironically, this attempt to cope with society's negative perception of women and girls by becoming more masculine can become a stressor in itself.

This further undermines positive appraisal of female identity. Females are not encouraged to view themselves realistically and positively (Cf. paragraph 6.2.3.3; 6.2.3.4).

#### **7.2.6.2 Manifestations of stress**

A few examples of manifestations of female stress were described in chapter six of this research project. The researcher focussed on manifestations such as bodily illness, acne vulgaris and somatoform disorders (Cf. paragraphs 6.3.1, 6.3.5, 6.3.8). Certain paragraphs described behavioural manifestations including visions and dreams, maladaptive coping mechanisms, mass hysteria and eating disorders (6.3.2, 6.3.3, 6.3.4, 6.3.6, 6.3.7). Emotional manifestations explained were post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), anxiety and clinical depression (Cf. paragraphs 6.6.3.3, 6.3.9, 6.3.10). A cognitive manifestation of contemporary female stress is low self-esteem that the researcher described as a stressor at micro-level in the individual female self. Other cognitive manifestations could present as part of the symptoms of the emotional manifestations of PTSD, anxiety and clinical depression such as forgetfulness. These examples suggest that women and girls involved in family life where individuals learn to become adults informally, as well as those participating in more formal educational milieus, do experience stress today. However, these female stress manifestations depend on various factors including the universally and eternally present female sociopsychobiological stress vulnerability and ever-present stressors often interconnected with time-bound factors (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1 [iii]).

#### **7.2.6.3 Coping mechanisms**

Contemporary women and girls try to cope with stress in ways that may sometimes appear unique to the present, but are based on timeless coping mechanisms and female needs such as the need for a positive appraisal of female identity (cf. 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 6.4.3, 6.4.6, 6.4.9). Depending on their vulnerability to stress (possibly a general female principal due to inherited and eternal psychobiosocial factors), contemporary women and girls manifest stress symptoms when confronted by time-bound stressors with which they may attempt to cope using mechanisms available in current society.

##### *(i) Positive appraisal of female identity*

Stress caused by a negative perception of female sociopsychobiological identity may be relieved in South Africa and elsewhere by awareness of gender empowerment mechanisms in society, anti-porn lobbying, sexuality training, access to AIDS intervention, access to violent crime

prevention strategies and literacy (Cf. paragraphs 6.4.1, 6.4.2, 6.4.3, 6.4.4, 6.4.6, 6.4.9). The knowledge that various social structures at governmental and non-governmental levels are aware of the need to perceive female identity positively and realistically may be of comfort to women and girls. This may, therefore, contribute to their formation of a realistic and positive self-concept.

(ii) *Finding inner peace*

In chapter six, the researcher briefly outlined some Westernised stress management techniques that include eastern methods. These alternative therapies sometimes involve relaxation strategies (Cf. paragraph 6.4.10). In the case of many contemporary females, stress release may be derived from the comfort derived from creative relaxation producing a sense of inner peace (Cf. paragraphs 6.4.5, 6.4.8, 6.4.10).

(iii) *Health management*

Adequate mental and physical health management may be a means for contemporary female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus to cope with stress disorders. In this chapter the researcher briefly outlined some Westernised stress management techniques that include eastern methods. These alternative therapies sometimes involve relaxation strategies (Cf. paragraph 6.4.10). A description of indigenous African healing therapies was also presented (Cf. 6.4.11).

(iv) *Communication*

In the case of many contemporary females, stress release may be derived from the comfort gained in attending support groups and centres, being aware of traditional and rural roots as well as the observance of traditional customs. These include rituals, music, singing, dance and the wearing of traditional clothes. By sharing, caring and relaxing in various creative ways, many contemporary women and girls feel a sense of peace (Cf. paragraphs 6.4.5, 6.4.7, 6.4.8).

(vi) *Maladaptive coping mechanisms*

Although the researcher included maladaptive coping mechanisms in her description of manifestations of stress, it is useful to mention this matter again since much of the female stress manifested today is due to various attempts to manage stress unproductively. For example,

substance abuse, eating disorder as well as sexual promiscuity leading to the spread of sexual diseases, unnecessary abortions and single motherhood could be described as maladaptive coping mechanisms used by contemporary females (Cf. paragraphs 6.2.2.4, 6.2.3.1, 6.2.3.2, 6.3.4, 6.3.6).

Stress levels are high in women and girls today despite awareness of the problem and attempts at solutions. There is a need for further analysis and recommendations regarding a solution to problem. This was the general aim of the previous six chapters of this research where the researcher examined the problem from a historical perspective. In the following paragraphs of this study, the researcher will evaluate the problem by comparing and contrasting the stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus of the past and present eras.

#### **7.2.7 What are the similarities and differences regarding stress experienced by the female participants in the present and past primary and secondary educational milieus?**

The researcher believes that various stressors (some similar, others different) face (faced) women and girls engaged in the educational act. However, four essential stressors underpinning these: female oppression; females being overburdened with responsibilities; female physiology; and denial of female identity (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.1 (i), 7.2.4.1 (ii), 7.2.4.1 (iii), 7.2.4.1(iv). The researcher believes that these four basic stressors are linked to female sociopsychobiological vulnerability to stress. In paragraph 1.2.3.1 (iii), the researcher explained how the factor of female vulnerability to stress influences the individual's response to a stressor. In light of this data, the researcher believes that years of female oppression may have contributed to female psychological vulnerability in the form of lack of assertiveness and a tendency to ponder feelings of mental pain. Moreover, experience of oppression over aeons, may have caused continual female social vulnerability as women are bearers of many burdens.

In paragraph 1.2.3.1 (iii), the researcher explained how the factor of female vulnerability to stress influences the individual's response to a stressor. In light of this data, the researcher believes that years of experiencing the burden of many responsibilities have contributed to female social vulnerability in the form of a continuous expectation to endure the brunt of domestic and family responsibilities. Moreover, experiencing so many social expectations over the millennia may have caused continual female physical vulnerability as bearers of children and other mental and physical strains that negatively affect the female body. In other words, nature and nurture as well as hormones and heritage have stressfully underpinned and

undermined the female experience of inevitable challenges that have confronted women and girls in the past and continue to do so in contemporary society.

Females in all five societies reviewed in this project have been victims of social, biological and psychological vulnerability to stress that underpinned and still underpins daily life and life events experienced by women and girls. Some of these are common to all eras including daily food preparation, family life and work as well as life events of hunger, death, disease, war and other examples of traumatic disasters. Basic female stress diathesis also underpinned stressors that may appear to vary in different eras and societies. In the case of the Industrial Era and contemporary society, tremendous, dramatic and rapid social upheaval, change and contrast would have been and still are seemingly unique causes of stress compared with the prehistoric, medieval and ancient worlds (Cf. paragraphs 5.2.1.1 – 5.2.1.4, 5.2.1.7, 6.2.1.2, 6.2.1.9). However, these stressors like many other challenges facing women and girls may not necessarily be or have been experienced as stressful in the long term nor would they have led to stress manifestations if it were not for the eternal factors lying at the root of female experience (Cf. paragraph 7.2.4.1).

With regard to manifestations of stress in the past and present female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus, it appears that all eras witnessed emotional, cognitive, behavioural or physical stress disorders such as social withdrawal (Cf. paragraphs 2.3, 3.3, 4.3); feelings of hopelessness (2.3, 3.3, 4.3); sadness, guilt and emotionality (2.3, 3.3, 4.3, 5.3, 6.3); anxiety (2.3, 4.3), suicide (3.3, 4.3, 5.3); mood swings (3.3, 4.3), hysteria (5.3, 6.3,8), physical disease (6.3.1), visions and dreams (6.3.2), post-traumatic stress disorder (6.3.3), maladaptive coping mechanisms (6.3.4, 3.4.1), skin disorders (6.3.5), eating disorders and mass hysteria (6.3.7, 6.3.8). Although more research needs to be done regarding past and present manifestations of stress, it appears that certain symptoms are universal such as anxiety, suicide, feelings of loneliness and helplessness. However, some unique manifestations in industrial and contemporary females appear such as the various physical symptoms (hysteria, somatoform disorder and skin disorders).

Apparent differences regarding coping mechanisms for female stress exist, although basic similarities can be traced. Some are maladaptive and became stressors in themselves (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [v]), 7.2.6.3 [v]). However, many adaptive strategies perceived (perceive) females in a positive light. Many successful coping mechanisms involved (involve) a positive perception of femaleness in its own right. This applied to early, ancient, medieval, industrial and contemporary society (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [i], 7.2.6.3 [i]). Other common coping strategies involved coping with an overload of responsibilities (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [ii],

7.2.6.3 [ii]) managing physical health (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [iii], 7.2.6.3 [iii]) and communication skills (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [iv], 7.2.6.3 [iv]).

### **7.2.8 Do the female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus suffer more from stress compared with the past?**

The researcher believes that woman and girls in contemporary South African homes and schools suffer more stress than their Westernised and indigenous predecessors. There appear to be manifestations and maladaptive coping mechanisms today that were not evident in the past such as physical disease, post-traumatic stress disorder, acne, eating disorders and mass hysteria (Cf. paragraphs 6.3.1, 6.3.3, 6.3.5, 6.3.6, 6.3.7). However, some are similar to those of the past such as somatoform disorders that resembled the hysteria of the Industrial Era (Cf. paragraphs 6.3.8, 5.3.3) and visions and dreams that occurred in both contemporary and medieval females (Cf. paragraphs 6.3.2, 4.4.12). Although the basic sociopsychobiological reasons for female stress vulnerability may be the same throughout time, and certain stressors have always confronted the female body and mind, today's female participants in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus are under pressure to cope with social change like their ancestors in the Westernised industrial era but unlike their ancestors in early, ancient and medieval society.

Females in the past were oppressed but were perhaps more free to retain their socio psychobiologically evolved identity than females today. Contemporary females today are under pressure to suppress their femaleness in order to succeed in the workplace and cope with the demands of the primary educational situation. Not only are women and girls in patriarchal societies such as most of Westernised and traditional society marginalized, they may suppress their feminine identity even further. This may be done by trying to find positive social and personal cognitive appraisal by becoming 'masculine' and adopting typically male identity characteristics such as aggressiveness, competitiveness and physical muscularity through exercise (Cf. paragraph 6.2.3.3). Females in the past also went against their nature at times (Cf. paragraph 7.2.4.1) but not to the extent of females today.

Whether females today suffer more from stress than the past, *stress* is, nevertheless, a timeless problem even in a world like that of hunter-gatherer society where the pace of life is slower than that of the Industrial Era and contemporary society. Evidence suggests that females in the past manifested stress although there was less conscious awareness of the concept compared with contemporary times. Nevertheless, as this investigation has shown early, ancient, medieval, industrial and contemporary society female participants in the primary and secondary

educational milieus sought and taught life-coping strategies. These coping mechanisms were analysed with a view to extracting and synthesising practical educational measures to solve the problem in future (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3, 7.2.6.3).

### **7.3 Recommendations**

Although there is awareness of the phenomenon of female *stress* in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus, provision could be made for more systematic guidance regarding this problem. The South African Department of Education could address this particular problem in curricula and syllabi. The researcher held an unstructured interview with Ms. L. Wood, University of Port Elizabeth (UPE) social worker, lecturer, life skills course designer and educational researcher in November 2002. The researcher learnt about the status of life skills education in the contemporary secondary educational milieu. According to Wood (2002), although specific life skills programmes that include stress management are prescribed in the life orientation syllabus of the Department of Education, these programmes are not necessarily actualised in primary and secondary educational milieus. Therefore, the issues of *female stress* may have to be dealt with indirectly via alternative learning programmes both within and outside of the formal teaching situation. In other words, even if the Department of Education made provision for this particular problem, it may not necessarily be taught in schools.

In the following paragraphs, specific guidelines are outlined to address the problem of *stress* in female participants in primary and secondary educational milieus. By means of virtual and print literature, expository as well as learner centred activities, children, parents, teachers and other caregivers may be made aware of the problem of female stress and acquire knowledge of stress management mechanisms. Generally valid essentials regarding the problem of stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus will underpin this particular learning and teaching situation with a view to solving the problem in the contemporary South African primary and secondary educational situation.

This research attempts to support the hypothesis that although stressors, manifestations and coping mechanisms may vary across the millennia, stress is a universal and eternal problem in the primary and secondary educational milieus for female participants who are predisposed to this affective disorder because of biological, psychological and social factors. Education may be able to alleviate female predisposition to stress disorder by providing direction concerning universally valid coping mechanisms described in paragraphs 7.2.4.3 and 7.2.6.3.

### **7.3.1 Recommendations regarding the contemporary primary educational milieu**

Educators could give talks via clinics, churches and schools to male and female primary caregivers and children to inform participants of the reality of stress throughout time and, especially, of female stress vulnerability. Educators would need to point out the reality of female stress today and the multitude of stressors, manifestations and maladaptive or adaptive coping strategies prevalent in contemporary South African society. These workshops need to reach the audience by means of relevant didactic principles that take cognisance of age, culture, literacy level and other factors. Generally, the aim should be to emphasise generally valid coping mechanisms described in paragraphs 7.2.4.3 and 7.2.6.3.

### **7.3.2 Recommendations regarding the contemporary secondary educational milieu**

Life Orientation is on the wane in schools and institutes of higher learning in South Africa today. However, the South African National Department of Education makes provision for this in school curricula and some South African institutes of higher learning have specific life skills courses such as the University of Port Elizabeth and the Port Elizabeth Technikon (Wood 2002; Jordaan 2002). Nevertheless, prescribed programmes currently being implemented do not focus on the serious problem of female stress. Life skills programmes could provide workshops for learners, teachers and parents with the same intended outcomes outlined in the previous paragraph concerning the primary educational milieu.

### **7.3.3 Specific female stress management programmes for children and adults in the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus**

Female participants would be able to cope more successfully with stress, if children and adults of both genders were taught to be aware of the universal reality of dysfunctional female stress and the possibility of managing female stress successfully. Female stress awareness and management, as a separate and complete section of life orientation training courses, should be offered to both male and female learners and educators in primary and high schools as well as institutions of higher learning in all areas of South African society - both rural and urban. Parents and other caregivers of children in the informal educational milieu should be informed about these issues by means of workshops presented by religious, welfare, medical or commercial organisations.

Where life orientation programmes are not run by schools, colleges and universities, workshops and seminars could be offered on an *ad hoc* basis by means of various institutions to inculcate understanding of the problem of female stress. Stress awareness and management, particularly with respect to female stress could be integrated with other subject-specific courses in schools and institutions of higher learning where particular life orientation courses are not presented. In an unstructured interview with Ms M Npote, a life skills course co-ordinator and lecturer, at the Port Elizabeth Technikon in November 2001, the lecturer learnt that in South African educational milieus the tendency is to integrate life orientation programmes with subject-specific teaching and learning. In other words, instead of specific life orientation lessons, life skills are indirectly taught via subject-specific material, teacher role models and peer learning support in the subject-specific group programmes. This is another way of teaching and learning about female stress in the secondary educational milieu for learners who would hopefully share their knowledge informally in the primary educational milieu of the home (Cf. Interviews 2 and 26).

Educators and other participants in the secondary educational milieu could convey their knowledge and perceptions regarding *stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus* in the course of their teaching and facilitating apparently unrelated subject-specific syllabi. Peer learning support groups could achieve the same aim of spreading awareness of and insight regarding possible solutions to the problem.

If the topic of *stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus* forms part of the official school curriculum, formal workshops or lectures in religious, medical or other institutions, the following stages in the process could be completed according to appropriate learner-centred didactic strategies:

The first stage in a workshop on female *stress* for male and female participants in primary and secondary educational milieus could involve expository as well as learner-centred teaching to facilitate an accurate understanding of the phenomenon of female stress as an age-old and contemporary affective disorder typified by feelings of tension and pressure and manifested by various physical, emotional and behavioural symptoms. Human and animal psychobiological sensitivity to the stress response could be explained in an amusing and user-friendly manner while emphasising that negative stress constitutes a grave problem.

The second stage in the facilitation process could deal with understanding of the concept of *stressors* and *causes of stress*. Workshop presenters could emphasise eternal factors, which

underpin time-related stressors. Children and adults should know risks that stress presents females today and in the past.

Females in the past and present manifested (manifest) stress but were/are not always aware of the nature of these physical, behavioural and emotional symptoms. Alternatively they ignored them and, thus, did (do) not know that they were under stress. However, female and male participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus could be assisted in developing self-knowledge and coping strategies for themselves and other participants (especially girls and women). Therefore, this third stage of the *stress education programme* would require the completion of suitable questionnaires regarding manifestations of stress. These questionnaires could be re-used by participants to sustain self-understanding regarding manifestations of stress. The parent, teacher or caregiver may find such questionnaires useful for the identification of female stress in participants.

Those who wish to may share their findings with the group. The questionnaires would have to be appropriately structured, worded and visually orientated according to target groups/individuals. With the very young or semi-literate individuals, observation and oral communication (structured and unstructured interviews and discussions) may prove the only way of dealing with the topic. During this research, the researcher found that the subject of *stress* is a very sensitive issue and observation and unstructured interviews are very useful ways to obtain empirical information.

The fourth and final stage of the workshop would deal with successful stress management and the provision of support to other participants. In the following paragraph 7.3.3.1, the researcher will outline some coping strategies, which could be unfolded to participants in the educational situation by means of learner relevant expository and learner-centred educational situations.

The 'lessons' dealt with in the four stages of the educational process described above could involve the following (depending on participants' level): brief explanatory talks by the facilitator (to introduce, make transitions and draw conclusions to the lessons); learner-centred activities such as games, worksheets, questionnaires, unstructured and structured interviews, role play, computer aided interactive learning, drama, art work (including posters, completion of cartoon bubbles or collages), group discussions (brainstorming, buzz groups, circular response, general discussions, media talk-back, panel discussions) and brief written exercises (diary entries, interviews, song lyric writing, poems, prayers, newspaper articles, open-ended stories). Questionnaires could be used to help participants understand their own or others' experiences

from the perspective of the both genders. Just as some women and girls have *male* characteristics due to nature and nurture, so some men and boys may have a *feminine* side and thus be vulnerable to stress. These lessons could be integrated with other subjects in the curriculum, especially social studies to increase awareness of generally valid essentials from a time and cultural perspective.

As stated the fourth stage in an educational programme regarding *female stress* would facilitate an understanding of universally successful stress coping mechanisms as explained in the following paragraphs.

### **7.3.3.1 Awareness of the need to perceive female identity in a positive light**

In paragraphs 7.2.4.3 and 7.2.6.1 the coping mechanism of *positive appraisal of female identity* was identified as a universally valid essential. Therefore, part of the solution to the problem of stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus could lie in a positive appraisal of natural and inherited female identity. Awareness of female stress and the need to respect female identity for its unique feminine difference and equal value could be taught in educational milieus to both male and female participants.

As is the case in the primary educational milieu, the formal educational milieu should inspire positive perceptions and an acceptance of femininity more than it does at present, especially with regard to occupational and career aspirations (Geyer *et al* 2002; De Koker 2002: 10). Literature and history syllabi should be revised to encourage positive perceptions of femaleness. Participants should be made aware of the different strategies used in the present and past by females and society in general to realise a positive perception of female identity (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [i] and 7.2.6.3 [i]).

If society perceives females positively and realistically, women will be more likely to develop a positive and realistic self-concept. Being female deserves respect and equity treatment that has been eroded over time. As has been illustrated, females in antiquity had a negative and unrealistic self-concept (Cf. paragraph 3.2.3.3); those in early society had a conflicting identity (Cf. paragraph 2.2.3.5); medieval females experienced stifled ambition, suppressed identity and intellectual frustration (Cf. paragraphs 4.2.3.6, 4.2.3.8, 4.2.3.9); and Industrial Era females were excluded from formal education to a large extent (5.2.2.11). Although contemporary women are more literate and enjoy better formal education than their ancestors, they still experience

social oppression, gender bias in education, frustrated self-actualisation in the workplace, forced emasculation of their female identity and stigmatisation (6.2.1.4, 6.2.1.9, 6.2.2.5, 6.2.3.3).

Although there would be little place in a group stress management programme for an in-depth study of individual aptitudes, interests and abilities or for career guidance, the concept of realistic gender-related self-acceptance and self actualisation could be taught. Imaginative facilitators could use various learning strategies including games, role-play, discussion, interactive media, drama as well as questionnaires to open the door to participants towards realistic self-acceptance and thence to more specific diagnostic guidance.

### **7.3.3.2 Relaxation techniques**

Females in the past and present societies studied in this research have employed various stress coping strategies, which generated feelings of inner peace, calm and relaxation (Cf. paragraph 7.2.4.3 [ii] and paragraphs 7.2.6.3 [ii]). Participants should be made aware of the plethora of mechanisms used in the past and present with a view to learning what could work for their particular stress problem. Participants should be made aware that relaxation strategies are useful pathways to stress management. However, if overdone or abused, they may become sources of pressure and stress as occurred at times during the era 1750 – 1950 and in contemporary society.

### **7.3.3.3 Health management**

Females in the past and present societies surveyed in this research appeared to cope with stress successfully by means of a healthy life-style (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [iii], (7.2.6.3[iii])). Early females probably led a healthy and physically active life out of doors gathering and frequently moving (Cf. paragraph 2.2.1.7, 2.2.2.5). Although stressors may have accompanied this life, physical health may have been a key to stress relief. Spartan females focused on healthy living including adequate exercise and nutrition suitable for bearers of the nation's warriors (Cf. paragraph 3.4.9). Even the Dark Ages witnessed an awareness of the importance of physical health in females (Cf. paragraphs 4.4.3, 4.4.13). Females during the Industrial Era enjoyed better nutrition (Cf. paragraph 5.4.14) and contemporary society is aware of the benefits of natural and herbal products as opposed to artificial products (Cf. paragraph 6.4.11). Mental and physical health depends on adequate nutrition, a moderate life-style and exercise which are often employed as coping strategies for stress in contemporary Westernised society (Cf. paragraphs 6.4.10).

An educational programme regarding the problem of *female stress* could facilitate an understanding of health management by disseminating interesting information. Practical instruction on healthy food preparation and moderate physical exercise could be included in these presentations.

#### **7.3.3.4 Communication**

Women and girls in the past and present societies surveyed in this research appeared to cope with stress successfully when they expressed their feelings and needs (Cf. paragraphs 7.2.4.3 [iv], 7.2.6.3[iv]). In the past and present, females were often not allowed to actualise their career or personal potential. Early females lacked identity and assertiveness (Cf. paragraphs 2.2.3.6, 2.2.3.8). Ancient world females suppressed their feelings and experienced frustration of their individual potential in a state of perpetual helplessness (Cf. paragraph 3.2.3.1, 3.2.3.2, 3.2.3.10). Medieval females were emotionally numb and did not express their feelings (Cf. paragraph 4.2.3.6, 4.3.3). Society acknowledged the reality of emotions in women and girls during the era 1750-1950. However, they were labelled and marginalised for this expressiveness. They were labelled as suffering from mental disorders such as *hysteria*, *melancholia* and *neurasthenia* (Cf. paragraph 5.3.3, 5.3.4, 5.3.5). Excessive emotional reactions could have been prevented if females had been taught during that time to express themselves appropriately and assertively (Cf. paragraphs 5.3.6). Contemporary females would possibly avoid severe stress disorders, such as physical disease, post-traumatic stress disorder and eating disorders (Cf. paragraphs 6.3.1 –6.3.8), if they were allowed to express their feelings appropriately, thereby preventing obsessive rumination of problems and negative feelings. This *ruminative thinking style* as it is termed, has been partly blamed for female psychological stress proneness (Cf. paragraph 1.2.3.1[iii]).

Women and girls could be taught to perceive their feelings realistically and positively. In the past they were not always allowed to assert themselves appropriately in order to come to terms with feelings of negative stress. In the contemporary primary and secondary educational milieus, lessons could be given on the topic of *assertiveness* through user-friendly methods including interactive media systems, graphics, drama, song, dance and discussions. The ultimate learning goal would be to facilitate alternative and appropriate ways of venting emotional symptoms of stress, such as anger or sadness, by means of sport, dance, games, music, hobbies, pets, humour, writing poetry and communicating with a supportive friend. Females should be made aware of these and other techniques, especially those used successfully

by females in the present and past. Useful techniques are those that suit traits such as tending and befriending needs (Cf. paragraph 7.3.3.6).

In the past, community support and universal directedness towards the good of the group was an important coping mechanism for stress experienced by females in early society, the ancient world, the Middle Ages, the Industrial Era working class and contemporary traditional society (Cf. paragraphs 2.4.16, 3.4.7, 4.4.10, 5.4.3, 6.4.7, 6.4.8). The extended family has generally deteriorated in contemporary Westernised society, leading to the loss of an important female coping mechanism. It is possible that when group identity and goals weaken, the ability to withstand stress diminishes and a valuable stress coping mechanism disappears. Contemporary females should grasp the importance of seeking and giving positive social support despite the rise of nuclear and single families. A stress reduction programme should emphasise the need to use this strategy especially among females for whom it is a nurtured and natural tendency to care and share.

To communicate adequately, individuals must be helped to overcome any fears and anxieties regarding conversation and communication in general. Communication is essential to stress reduction especially communication with those who can help in times of stress. Frequent verbal participation in a lesson and group or pair discussions will help participants develop and rediscover the female gift and skill of communicating emotional needs and talking about stress.

Language classes could assist in this communicative approach to stress management. In the context of contemporary Westernised and traditional South African educational milieus comprised of multilingual and multicultural learners, the need to build communication skills is vital especially with regard to sharing and releasing negative affective experience.

Individuals especially girls and women may benefit from group discussions to reduce stress. In particular, the African *psyche* prefers healing within the group, not as an individual. Female participants may learn to enjoy expressing their emotional selves and their needs and, thus, receive assistance with regard to their stress (G.M.S.A. 1994).

#### **7.4 CONCLUDING REMARKS**

This research has attempted to show that stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus is a universal problem. However, excessive stress evident in individuals today, particularly females, can be handled appropriately. In the words of Freud (in Slaby 1991:x):

Stress to the personality, allows us to better understand our biological, psychological, social, and existential parameters that converge to make us who we are, and provide an opportunity for growth that might not have been possible if the crisis had not occurred.

Biological, psychological and social factors have always determined and still determine the stress experienced by female participants in the primary and secondary educational milieus. Female stress is a contemporary problem in South Africa in particular. Yet, stress may allow South Africans to reach great heights, if it is coped with successfully. If Africa was the birthplace of the earliest biped, then its inhabitants can evolve beyond stress too. Although South African life may appear to be stressful for women and girls, they should not lose hope in the struggle to find solutions to the problem. Women and girls should particularly avoid maladaptive coping mechanisms, such as the abuse of Westernised and Eastern therapies (Cf. paragraph 6.3.10; 7.2.4.3 [v], 7.2.6.3 [v]).

Historically, human females are socially, physically and psychologically vulnerable to stress. If an awareness of the problem and the need for its management by employing age-old strategies is infused into the collective human mind, then the stress experienced by females since its origins among a 'group of females in Africa', may be less likely to manifest itself in physical and mental symptoms in personal female history (Northrup: 1998:71).