

# 27<sup>th</sup> European Cardiology Conference

October 22-24, 2018 | Rome, Italy

## Assessing perceived stress and dysfunctional coping in youths: A study of cardio-vascular disease risks

Obiageli Helen Ezeh<sup>1</sup> and C C Ezeh<sup>2</sup>  
Ahmadu Bello University, Nigeria

**Background:** Deaths from hypertension, stroke, and heart attacks are on the increase in sub-Saharan Africa including Nigeria, climbing from 12.3 million deaths to 17.3 million. The rates of hypertension in Nigeria jumped from 11 percent in 1997 to 40 percent in 2013. Globally, more than 75 percent of deaths from cardiovascular diseases come from income-restricted countries. Stress has been called “health epidemic of the 21st century” by the World Health Organization (W H O), with unquantifiable biological, psychological and social costs. More than 75 percent of visits to physician's office are for stress-related illnesses. Stress causes and worsens pre-existing health problems. For example, it delays healing process in wounds, it causes blood to clot more easily, it is also associated with sleep disturbances, anxiety and depression, oxygen demand is increased because of elevated blood pressure and heart rate, etc. Cardiovascular diseases have been linked to chronic psychological stress. Body's stress response is triggered by perceived stress and not actual or experienced stress. When a threatening situation is perceived-physical or psychological, the fight-or-flight response is kicked-in. Levels of stress hormones such as cortisol and adrenaline become high. Cortisol levels build up in the body as a result of chronic stress, which may change the way that clots form, raise blood pressure and blood sugar and increases the risk for heart attack if it is sustained over time. It also increases other physical, psychological and behavioural risk factors including, angina (a heart-disease-related chest pain), smoking, alcohol consumption, physical inactivity, under eating and over eating (emotional eating) etc, all of which are important risk factors for cardio-vascular diseases. The effects of stress are directly linked to coping. Coping is the activities undertaken to master, tolerate, reduce or minimize the negative effects of stress. Research indicates that functional coping strategies are more effective in reducing and preventing negative effects of stress. Functional coping is effective, positive, and healthy coping mechanism that reduces levels of stress and stress-related problems, examples of functional coping include; aerobic exercise, planning, support etc. On the other hand, dysfunctional coping is negative, ineffective, maladaptive and unhealthy coping style that may reduce the tolerance for physical and psychological symptoms and worsens quality of life eg smoking, drinking, use of other substances, overeating, un-safe sex etc. Increased levels of stress and dysfunctional coping may contribute significantly to cardiovascular disease. High levels of perceived stress and dysfunctional coping may favor development of heart disease. The good news is that effective, adequate and functional coping strategies can reduce levels of stress and severity of cardiovascular diseases, improve heart health and promote general physical and psychological health. The information from the findings of this study may be utilized to diagnose, treat, prevent cardio-vascular disease and promote optimal heart health.