



Perceived Occupational Stress and Management Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Teachers in Aba South Local Government Area

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ABSTRACT

Stress is part and parcel of everyday life. The fact one is living implies that one is experiencing some amount of stress. It is on this basis that the study aimed at finding out Perceived Occupational Stress and Management Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Teachers in Aba South Local Government Area. Three research questions guided the study while two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study and a population of 98 secondary school teachers in Aba South Local Government was used for the study. The sample size of 98 secondary school teachers was selected through purposive sampling techniques. Instrument used for data collection was a validated test instrument titled "Occupational Stress Management Strategies Questionnaire for Secondary School Teachers" which was made up of thirty items. The reliability index of 0.78 was obtained for the instrument using Cronbach Alpha Statistics. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research questions while z-test was used to answer hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. The results of the study showed amongst others that the secondary school teachers perceived occupational stress to a great extent. Based on the findings, conclusions were drawn and recommendations were made: Provision of stress management programs and encouragement services is a necessity for both the newly employed and more experienced teachers in order to improve their work efficiency and alleviates impending health problems resulting from work stress.

Keywords: Occupation, stress, management strategies

INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is recognized worldwide as a major challenge to workers health and healthiness of their organizations. It constitutes a major health problem in workplaces accounting for much of the physical illness, family problems and psycho-social problems experienced by teachers (Communication Workers of American, 2014). This diverse occupational stress affects the effectiveness of teachers' teaching assignments. Off course, a teacher is expected to plan her classroom lessons, organize and

manage the students for effective teaching and learning, administer continuous assessments, conduct internal examination, evaluate student's performance, write lesson notes, maintaining discipline among students and organize extra-curricular activities for over-all well-being of students (Van-Velso & Orozco, 2006). Essentially, teachers are the most important members of our society. They are the backbone of any society as they guide and help the students of all categories in realizing their full potentials. Teachers are instrumental in shaping and molding every child's attitude and perception towards life. They inspire and set students on purpose, making them ready for their future. There is enormous evidence that teachers job all over the world are stressful and, Nigeria is not an exception. Stress is becoming increasingly problematic in the teaching profession as teachers work long and harder hours to see better output in teaching and learning activities. Situations and events that excessively place psychological and physical demand on a teacher may cause stress. Hence, stress is the result of a misfit between the teachers and the work environment.

According to Dobson and Smith (2000), stress is seen as the dominant psychological problem of today. It is seen as the non-specific response to the body to any demand made upon it, it could be perceive as a feeling which occurs when an individual's working or living condition or circumstance make demands beyond the individual's capacity to handle a situation, physically or emotionally (Oboegbulam, 2007). In furtherance, Achalu (2001) opined that stress is a state of one being subjected to external forces or pressures which can either be good (eustress) or bad (distress). Teachers that experiences eustress will be able to attend to their daily teaching demands which will bring about qualitative work life among them. For example, there will be high level of productivity, increased job satisfaction and morale; positive job value. Similarly, teachers who experiences distress will be unable to fulfill their daily job demands and consequently results in low job productivity, ineffectiveness in class delivery poor job quality (Fevre 2003; Leka 2004).

Intrinsically, teacher are exposed to internal and external stressors such as extended school working hours, poor working environment that constitute overcrowded classrooms, non-equipped teachers, deadline for submission of continuous assessment, scores and lesson notes, work-overload, student with poor academic background, students with lackadaisical attitudes towards learning; parental ambivalence towards the educational well-being of their children, teachers incompetence and lack of confidence in their ability, bureaucratic interference exemplified by frequent and arbitrary changes of school policy, lack of autonomy in execution of job responsibilities, conflict between and family responsibilities, non-payment and delay payment of teacher's salary, low corresponding motivation from the head, inadequate instructional materials/resources, lack of job security and poor staff development (Adebola & Mukhtari, 2008).

Teachers are also faced with personal problems that encroached into their work life such family conflict, pressures, and financial problems. These multi-faceted tasks of the teachers place a demand on their coping abilities and put them under stress which affects their well being. Thus, Nnoye (2016) stated that if teachers level of stress is not properly managed it will adversely affect their level of health resulting to apathy and negativism to work, fatigue, depression, alienation, hostile language/irritability, physical problem, accident proneness, absenteeism, repeated forgetfulness, difficulty in concentration, aggressiveness and rapid heartbeat. Stress management comprises of measures individuals take to cope with trying periods, so that a state of psychological and physiological equilibrium is established and subsequently maintained According to Oboegbulam, (2004) stress management is a skill of dealing in a successful way the pressure or worry caused by the problems in our individual's life. Accordingly, Oluchi and Nwamuo (2013) stated that stress management is the amelioration of stress, especially those that are chronic and capable of affecting one's physical, psychological and social state. These stress management strategies as stated by Bruess and Richardson (2000) as individual's planned attempt to avoid certain external forces or events, reduce the seriousness of the events through mental and emotional control, or act to reduce the stress response after it occurs. Ogoegulem (2004) buttressed that they are coping actions, behaviors or attitudes which a teacher can exhibit when faced with certain psycho-social demands that tax their individual's adaptive resources.

Stress Management Strategies by Secondary school Teachers include;

- Discussing problems with their friends or colleagues, decreasing number of students.
- Taking part in classroom training programs, for personal development and resilience (Neves-de Jesus et al., 2014)
- mini-brakes during work hours for relaxation and to ease work pressure
- Blocking time effectively to make sure that specific tasks are carried out,
- Seeking for help when necessary and breaking the task down into small parts rather than trying to do the whole thing at once
- Increasing wages and numerical strength of classroom teachers
- Development of the social support network and mentors for professional development amongst others.

This work is supported with the findings of Oforjindu (2011) which revealed that the strategies secondary school teachers use in managing stress include: having adequate rest, taking natural supplement, financial discipline, prioritizing commitments, being at peace with God, having regular medical check-up, sharing worries with people, developing good sense of humour, engaging in social and humanitarian activities outside work. Teachers are meant to utilize these coping strategies to manage their job stress in order to overcome low job productivity and performance in their workplace resulting from stress.

The efficacy of the coping strategies is contingent on the nature of stress involved and the situation at hand. Reactions to coping will be partially managed by teachers' disposition and their social settings, especially the intrinsic features of the stressful atmosphere (Brannon & Feist, 2009; Graver & Connor – Smith, 2010). Therefore, for an effective and efficient performance in the classroom, good stress management strategies among school teacher become imperative.

Statement of the Problem

It is generally believed that stress is inevitable as long as one is living. It is present in every occupation, including secondary schools. The secondary school system is a veritable environment for teaching and learning activities and teaching at secondary level can be tough, tedious and demanding because some students at this level are characterized with physical and emotional changes that put them at risk of all sorts of behavioural problem. Apart from this, these teenagers at secondary school level dabble in drug abuse, violent activities, gangster activities, truant behaviour and other delinquent behaviours. In spite of all these behavioural mal-adjustment, teachers still carry out their designated classroom duties in this social context, teaching children from a wide spectrum of racial, religious and economic backgrounds which poses a huge stress on them. Stress is a serious threat on teachers' abilities to meet up with their teaching demands in the school. He or she is faced with disrupted emotional, cognitive and psychological functioning which could be a barrier to the attainment of educational excellence at that level. However, government and educational authorities are making concerted efforts to making teaching jobs an eventful work by employing capable teachers, engaging teachers in educational and stress management program; provision of teaching resources to alleviate the stressful conditions of teachers and its attendant consequences. Yet, teachers are subjected daily on excessive job demands that increase their level of job stress which results to adverse health problems. Skaalvik and Skaalvik (2015), in their study on job satisfaction, stress and coping strategies in the teaching profession found out that both the workload and the accumulation of numerous sources of stress have a number of maladaptive consequences. Important consequences for a number of the teachers were physical and emotional exhaustion, the sacrifice of social lives, increasing instances of sick leave, the reduction of teachers' employment with economic consequences for the individual teachers, early retirement, with disability pension for some teachers. However, if teachers should adopt stress management strategies their stressful situations can be ameliorated bringing about an increasing versatile result with fewer devastating effect. Obviously, the success of the entire nation, educational system to be precise depends on the availability of competent, well trained, conscientious, healthy, efficient, highly motivated and productive classroom teachers. It is against this background that the study is determined to find out Perceived Occupational Stress and Management Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Teachers in Aba South Local Government Area

Research Questions

- 1) What are the sources of occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Aba South Local Government Area
- 2) What is the effect of occupational stress as perceived by secondary school teachers in Aba South Local Government Area?
- 3) What are the stress management strategies adopted by secondary school teachers in Aba South Local Government Area?

Hypotheses

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female teachers on the extent of effect of occupational stress as perceived by secondary school teachers
2. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female teachers regarding stress management strategies adopted by secondary school teachers

METHODS

The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The study covered all the secondary school male and female teachers in seven public secondary schools in Aba South Local Government Area of Abia State. The population for the study was made up of 98 teachers, which were 30 males and 68 females. Purposive sampling technique was used to select the entire teachers as the sample size due to the smallness of the population. The instrument used for data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire, which was face validated by three experts, two from Health Education and one from Measurement and Evaluation. The instrument comprised of 30 questionnaire items divided in clusters according to the three research questions. Reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach Alpha statistics, which yielded a reliability index of 0.78. Copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondents by the researcher and research trained assistants that are assistant heads of the schools used in the study. Research questions were analyzed using mean to find the mean scores and standard deviation while z-test statistics was used to test the 2 null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS

Research Question 1: *What are the sources of occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Aba South L.G.A?*

Table 4.1: Results of Data Analysed on the Sources of Occupational Stress among Teachers in Aba South LGA n=98

S//N	Items	Male Teacher			Female Teacher			Pulled Responses		
			S D			S D			S D	
1	Poor working environment	2.81	0.22	A	2.76	0.19	A	2.79	0.15	A
2	Deadline for submission of continuous assessment scores and lesson notes	1.74	0.42	DA	1.78	0.32	DA	1.76	0.33	DA
3	Lack of adequate instructional materials and facilities for effective teaching and learning	1.96	0.11	DA	1.94	0.15	DA	1.95	0.09	DA
4	Inadequate professional trainings for teachers	2.21	0.32	A	2.23	0.26	A	2.22	0.31	A
5	Dearth of administrative and supervisory support	1.46	0.16	DA	1.51	0.19	DA	1.49	0.21	DA
6	Large size of class with one teacher to teach	3.1	0.09	SA	2.99	0.10	A	3.07	0.08	SA
7	Delay and non-payment of salaries	2.94	0.23	A	2.97	0.19	A	2.96	0.16	A
8	Low motivation for teachers' performance and low promotional opportunities	1.98	0.41	DA	1.92	0.38	DA	1.95	0.25	DA
9	Teachers' incompetence and lack of confidence	1.86	0.47	DA	1.84	0.33	DA	1.85	0.31	DA
10	Lack of social support	2.12	0.56	A	2.13	0.42	A	2.13	0.39	A
	Cluster means	= 2.22			2.21			2.27		
	Cluster Standard Deviation	SD = 0.56			0.52			0.50		

Results of data analysis presented in table 4.I showed the sources of occupational stress for Male Teachers column I, the sources of occupational stress for female teachers' column 2 and the pulled responses of both male and female teachers, column 3. Each column showed the mean responses, the standard deviation and the decision for each item. The table showed that the respondents agreed on 4 sources of occupation stress. These items have mean values between 2.00 and less than 2.99 and are items 1, 4, 7 and 10. These items have mean values of 2.81, 2.21, 2.94 and 2.12 in that order. Only item 6 have a mean value above 3 which is strongly agreed.

Research Question 2: *What is the effect of occupational stress as perceived by secondary school teachers in Aba South Local Government Area?*

Table 4.2: Results of Data Analyzed on the Effect of Occupational Stressed Perceived by Teachers

S//N	Items	Male Teacher			Female Teacher			Pulled Responses		
		n = 30			n = 68					
			SD	D		SD	D		SD	D
	Effects of Occupational Stress									
11	Constantly filled with negativism towards assigned duties	3.1	0.12	VGE	2.96	0.14	GE	3.15	0.31	VGE
12	Pessimisms is the order of the day	2.94	0.12	GE	3.03	0.12	VGE	2.99	0.28	GE
13	They show apathy towards work and classroom duties	3.22	0.12	VGE	3.12	0.15	VGE	3.17	0.14	VGE
14	Wellbeing of students suffer	3.34	0.08	VGE	3.29	0.10	VGE	3.30	0.09	VGE
15	Difficulty in concentrating in their designated class duties	3.43	0.07	VGE	3.65	0.06	GE	3.54	0.05	GE
16	Regular body pains an increased state of hypertension	3.0	0.09	VGE	3.1	0.12	VGE	3.03	0.08	VGE
17	Experience of high level of boredom and monotony	3.51	0.04	VGE	3.52	0.05	VGE	3.52	0.05	VGE
18	Easily fatigued and prone to accident	2.89	0.26	GE	3.14	0.09	VGE	3.02	0.12	VGE
19	Reduction in efficiency of teachers' lesson delivery	3.15	0.16	VGE	3.34	0.09	VGE	3.25	0.13	VGE
20	Aggressive behaviour towards students and oneself	2.88	1.14	GE	2.65	1.13	GE	2.77	0.29	GE
	Cluster Means	= 3.10			3.12			3.17		
	Cluster Standard Deviation	SD = 0.20			0.27			0.12		

Results of data analysis presented in Table 4. 2 showed the results of data analyzed on the extent of occupational stress as perceived by teachers. The table showed that male Teachers perceived occupation stress to a very great extent on 17 out of the 20 items. These are items 11, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, and 19. They experienced occupational stress to a great extent on 3 items. These are items 12, 18, and 20. In fact one may say that the respondents' perceived serious occupational stress on all the items listed. In a similar manner, the female respondents perceived occupational stress to a very great extent on 8 of the items. These are items 12, 13, 14, 15, 16, 17, 18 and 19. On the other hand, they perceived occupational stress to a great extent on only two items. These are items 11 and 20. However, one can conclude that the respondents' perceived occupational stress based on the factors specified.

Research Question Three: What are the stress management strategies adopted by teachers in Aba South Local Government Area.

Table 4.3: Results of Data Analyzed on Stress Management Strategies Adopted by Teachers

S//N	Items	Male Teacher			Female Teacher			Pulled Responses		
		n = 30			n = 68					
			SD	D		SD	D		SD	D
	Stress Management Strategies									
21	Open up to discussion with friends and colleagues	2.52	0.33	A	2.63	0.41	A	2.58	0.38	A
22	Setting rituals to reduce chance factor	0.34	0.74	A	2.58	0.62	A	2.46	0.63	A
23	Avoidance of situations or persons that generate stress	1.64	1.10	DA	1.77	1.12	DA	1.71	0.99	DA
24	Blocking of time to make sure specific tasks are done	1.82	0.98	DA	1.99	0.56	DA	1.91	0.76	DA
25	Developing support groups and mentorship	1.63	0.65	DA	1.88	1.23	DA	1.76	0.94	DA
26	Seeking help to fulfil assigned responsibilities, admitting you cannot do everything	2.56	0.43	A	2.87	0.08	A	2.72	0.33	A
27	Breaking large classroom work down into small part rather than doing all at once	2.75	0.35	A	2.95	0.44	A	2.85	0.40	A
28	Taking part in training programmes for personal development and resilience	1.39	1.11	DA	1.56	0.81	DA	1.48	0.90	A
29	Establishment of attitude full of kindness and gratitude to boost morale	1.98	0.89	DA	1.46	1.13	DA	1.72	0.60	DA
30	Establishment of mini breaks during work hours to ease work pressure	2.68	0.54	A	2.83	0.64	A	2.76	0.58	A
	Cluster Means	= 2.13			2.25			2.20		
	Cluster Standard Deviation	SD = 0.50			0.58			0.52		

Results of data analysis presented in table 4.3 showed that both the male and the female teachers agreed that they adopt five of the 10 stated strategies in stress management while rejecting 5. The accepted 5 are in items 1, 2, 6, 7 and 10 while the rejected strategies are in numbers 3, 4, 5, 8 and 9. The cluster means values of 2.13 and 2.25 together with pulled mean and standard deviations reflect this observation. The absolute mean values of 2.13 for males and 2.25 for females tend to indicate that the female respondents are more in agreement in adopting these stress management strategies.

4.2: Test of Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference between the mean responses scores of male and female teachers on the extent of effect of occupational stress as perceived by secondary school teachers.

Table 4.3: Results of Hypothesis Test on the Extent of Occupational Stress perceived by Teachers

S o u r c e s	n		S D	P	z c a l	z c r i t	D e c i s i o n
Male Teachers	30	3.10	0.20	<0.05	0.41	1.96	Do not reject Ho
Female Teachers	68	3.12	0.27				

Results of hypothesis test presented in table 4 shows that there is no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teachers in Aba South L.G.A on the extent of effect of occupational stress they perceived. This was observed from the calculated z of 0.41 which is less than the critical z of

1.96. From the table the mean score of the male teachers was 3.10 with a standard deviation of 0.20 while the mean score of the 68 female teachers was 3.12 with a standard deviation of 0.27. The probability level was 0.05. The critical t was 1.96. Since the calculate z was less than the critical z the null hypothesis was not rejected.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference between the mean response scores of male and female teachers on the stress management strategies utilized by secondary school teachers.

Table 5: Results of Hypothesis Test on the Stress Management Strategies Utilized by Teachers

S o u r c e s	n		S D	P	z _{cal}	z _{crit}	D e c i s i o n
Male Teachers	30	2.13	0.50	<0.05	1.04	1.96	Do not reject Ho
Female Teachers	68	2.25	0.58				

Results of hypothesis Test presented in Table 5 showed that there is no significant difference between the mean response scores of male and female teachers in Aba South L.G.A on the stress management strategies they utilized. The level of significance was 0.05 and the critical z 1.96. Since the calculated z was less than the critical z the null hypothesis was not rejected.

4.3: Summary of major findings

From this study the following findings were made:

1. Sources of occupational stress teachers in Aba South L.G.A were poor working environment, inadequate professional training, delay and non-payment of salaries, and lack of social support.
2. Effects of occupational stress on teachers in Aba South L.G.A were apathy to work, pessimism, apathy to instructional delivery, poor care for students, difficulty concentrating on duty, regular body pains, fatigue, and reduction in work efficiency, and aggression.
3. Strategies adopted for stress management by teachers in Aba South L.G.A are having discussions with colleagues, routinizing work procedures, seeking outside help, breaking down large volume of work into smaller pieces and going out for break at intervals during work.
4. There is no significant difference between the mean response scores of male and female teachers in Aba South L.G.A
 - (i) The extent of effect of occupational stress they perceived and
 - (ii) The strategies they utilized in managing stress

DISCUSSION

Findings of the study were discussed accordingly

The results of the findings in respect of this research question clearly showed the position of the respondents with respects to the sources of occupational stress among secondary school teachers, in Aba South Local Government Area. Generally, results in table 4.1 indicated that both male and female teachers in the study area accepted only sources of stress that are above the acceptable norm on the scale. For example, the teachers agreed that large size of class with one teacher to teach, poor working environment, inadequate professional training for teachers, delay and non-payment of salaries and finally lack of social support respectively are their sources of occupational stress.

This was not surprising and therefore expected. Evidently in Abia State, teachers' salaries are delayed unnecessarily and paid not as obligated to. As a result; there are low rate of employment and lack of qualified teachers to be employed as many job seekers dread government teaching jobs. This findings is in consonance with what Jude (2011) opined that delayed and non-payment of salaries, negative community attitude, heavy workload, lack of co-operation from heads and colleagues, duties other than teaching, students' parents insults and assaults, political interference, students' misbehavior, poor working environment, time pressure are eminent sources of stress among secondary school teachers.

Results in table 4.2 revealed that both male and female teacher's perceived occupational stress to a very great extent on seven items out of ten and eight items out of ten respectively with the highest mean scores of 3.51 for males who experiences of high level of boredom and monotony and 3.65 for females as they

encounter difficulty in concentrating in their designated class duties. The findings were not surprising because job conditions predispose workers to level of stress.

On the test of hypothesis one and from the result as shown in table 4, the statement of hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teachers in Aba South Local Government Area on the extent of occupational stress they perceive. This means that both the male and the female respondents are saying the same thing on the extent of occupational stress they perceived. Hence, gender has no significant effect on the respondents' perception of occupational stress.

It is also explained by Slyers (2011) that stress is a general response which the human body makes to any demand placed on it. It is a worry which is physical, psychological, physiological and sociological which may result from not meeting with certain demands at the work place. This concurs with Hansen (2007), who confirmed that teachers experiences apathy, negativism, low morale, boredom, anxiety, frustration, fatigue, depression, alienation, anger/irritability, physical problem (headache, stomach problem), and absenteeism when stressed or when stress in its overdosed form. The multi-faceted task of teachers places a demand on their coping abilities and put them under stress which affects their well being. This findings is in consonance with what Nnoye (2016) stated that if teachers level of stress is not properly managed it will adversely affect their level of health resulting to depression, alienation, hostile language/irritability, physical problem, accident proneness, repeated forgetfulness, difficulty in concentration, aggressiveness and rapid heartbeat.

Results in table 3 indicated that majority of the teachers do utilize stress management strategies and have adopted five of the management strategies amongst the ten. This was not surprising and therefore expected. Female teachers open up to discussion with their friends and colleagues, set up their daily routines to avoid chance factor and breaking large classroom work down into small parts rather than doing all at once. Also, male teachers seek helps to fulfill assigned responsibilities admitting they cannot do everything, thereafter, establishing mini-brakes during work hours to ease work pressure. This is in line with Bruess and Richardson (2000) who reported that blocking of time effectively to make sure that specific tasks are carried out, seeking for help when necessary and breaking the task down into small parts rather than trying to do the whole thing at once are effective ways of managing stress among teachers.

On the test of hypothesis one and from the result as shown in table 5, the statement of hypothesis was accepted. This implies that there was no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teachers in Aba South Local Government Area on the stress management strategies they utilized. This means that both the male and the female respondents are saying the same thing on the extent of occupational stress they perceived. Thus, strategies employed by teachers in managing their occupational stress were commendable.

CONCLUSION

The study has identified the sources of stress among teachers. The stressors identified been large size of classes with one teacher to teach, delay in payment of salaries and lack of social support. Stress management strategy is a skill of dealing in a successful way work pressure or worry caused by individual's work life, specifically to teachers in this context. This study has determined the occupational stress management strategies utilized by male and female teachers in Abia State precisely Aba South Local Government Area and to the best knowledge of the researcher it is the first of its kind in Aba South Local Government area for the reason that people will always perceive teaching as everybody easy job. Presently, there are no literatures or empirical work on occupational stress management strategy as perceived by teachers in Aba South Local Government area. This work has contributed immensely in filing the gap. The results of the study have established that the female teachers tend to adopt stress management strategies more than the male counterpart. The null hypotheses of no significant difference between the mean scores of male and female teachers on the extent of effect occupational stress were not rejected. Also, the null hypothesis of no significant difference on the stress management strategies utilized by teachers was not rejected. The study concludes that teachers in the Aba South Local Government Area

perceived occupational stress highly, thus the need for increased awareness of occupational stress management strategies is necessitated.

RECOMMENDATION

1. With regards to the finding that large class size had a high influence on stress among teachers in public secondary schools of the study, the study recommended that students - teacher ratio be reduced by employing more teachers to reduce the student - teacher contact hours which is a stressor
2. The administrative bodies of the secondary schools of this Local Government Area need to make learning environment more participatory and conducive for teachers to actively participate in tasks and decisions which are related to them.
3. Government needs to improve on teacher's incentives and payment packages, recruit more teachers in the teaching profession so as to ease the heavy workload on teachers. Also a minimal number of students of about 40 per class should be approved and maintained to enhance class effectiveness control by the teacher during teaching and learning activities.

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