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## STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOL TEACHERS IN NIGERIA

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### ABSTRACT

*The study provides empirical evidence for the management of stress by teachers of secondary schools in Nigeria. A total of 3,466 teachers, drawn from secondary schools in Ogun State of Nigeria, returned their instrument for the study. Data were analysed using percentages and chi-square. The findings indicate that teachers frequently use the active behavioural and inactive (escape) strategies in managing stress. While the active cognitive strategies are never used, the teachers express mixed feelings about the adoption of the inactive behavioural strategies. Also, sex, qualifications and location have a relationship with the type of stress coping strategies adopted by the teachers.*

### Introduction

The issue of occupational stress has been of concern to many

people, especially pundits and experts in management. The issue becomes pertinent because workers in all sectors experience one form of stress or another in their work places. Stress, if not properly managed, could therefore affect the level of productivity of the workers.

Stress, as defined by Quick, Sckade and Eakin (1986), is the generalised, patterned, unconscious mobilization of internal energy resources that occur when a person is confronted with a stressor. The stressor is that condition that causes stress. The symptoms of stress could be internal or external. According to Riches (1994), the internal symptoms may include: feeling sick, being moody or having headache. The external symptoms may be throwing things, shaking with rage, weeping, etc. It is however possible for many people to experience different levels of stress, even while working under the same condition.

The signals of stress could also be behavioural and physiological. The behavioural signals include feeling of weakness and faintness, snapping at colleagues, not listening to others; doing things hurriedly; losing personal possessions; feelings of being dominated by time; feeling oppressed by imagined peer; administrative demands, etc. (Hansen, 1986). The physiological signals of stress include; high blood pressure, shaky nerves, intolerance to heat, backaches, anxiety and failure in sexual performance, etc. (Adegoroye, 1985). All these changes, according to Okorie (1997) could result into abnormal functioning in the work place. She further stated that chronic lateness to work, sloppiness, absenteeism, staff turnover, feeling of not being appreciated and decrease in work quality are also common symptoms of stress, which could affect staff morale and quality of work.

Studies have shown that teachers experience various degrees of stress. The teaching profession is not only stressful (ILO, 1981), but also increasing occurrence of unpleasant emotions, such as tension, frustration and anger as a result of teaching work has been reported (Kyriacous, 1980). From Britain, it was reported that pupils' poor attitudes, low motivation and

general uncooperativeness are factors of stress among teachers (Laslett and Smith, 1984). In Nigeria, Duyilemi (1992) discovered that lack of resources for teaching, delay in promotion, students coming to classes without necessary materials, having to teach large classes and poor attitudes of students to work were perceived to be major sources of occupational stress among teachers of primary schools. Ijaiya (2000) also reported that factors considered by teachers as stressors are poor conditions of service with the consequence of being unable to fulfil personal responsibilities; lack of recognition by the society; lack of promotion, work overload in the school, poor facilities for teaching and poor pupil academic achievement.

The indications that emerge, therefore, are that the teaching job is very stressful. The list of job-related stressors, identified by Gupta (1981) are very relevant to the Nigerian teachers. These are : role overload, role insufficiency, role ambiguity and feeling responsible for others. Role overload is a situation in which a worker is overburdened and made to achieve results within a limited time. Inadequate teachers have continued to be the bane of the Nigerian Educational system. The consequence of this situation

in the view of Arikewuyo (1999) is that a great burden would be placed on the available teachers.

Role insufficiency occurs when one works with inadequate materials and tools. This also applies to all levels of the Nigerian educational system. Nwagwu (1997) reported that the crisis of shortage of infrastructural facilities, such as library facilities and books, classrooms, furniture, laboratories and workshops, cut across all levels of the system. Role ambiguity occurs when the teacher is not quite clear about the role/task assigned or delegated to him or about how his work will be evaluated. Ijaiya (2000), however, contends that although Nigerian teachers know that they are employed to teach, the lopsided manner by which promotion is carried out makes many of them unclear about the criteria with which their work is being judged.

Feeling responsible for others implies that one feels accountable for the progress of others. Apart from being "in loco parentis" to their students, teachers also carry the responsibilities of ensuring the social, emotional and intellectual development of their students, as most parents have now abdicated the role of taking care of their children to teachers, while they run

after all sorts of business (Ijaiya, 2000).

Another study by the International Labour Organisation (ILO) captured the stressful nature of teaching profession in many third world countries, (which include Nigeria), in this way:

Overcrowded classes leading to overwork and stress which can cause lasting damage to health; the unsafe and insanitary conditions of some school buildings and the dearth of teaching materials ... (quoted by Taal, 1995).

In coping with stress, four major strategies have been suggested. The inactive behavioural strategies involve confronting or attempting to change the source of stress. The active cognitive strategies involve problem appraisal, talking about the source of stress and seeking more information. The inactive behavioural strategies involve behaviours of escape and avoidance of the source of stress. The inactive cognitive strategies involve conforming with superiors' expectations, perceiving helplessness and expressing resentment.

However, many researchers of teachers' stress in Nigeria have only focused on the sources and

causes of stress and thereby suggested theoretical strategies for ameliorating the menace. Most authors have not tried to find out how teachers cope with stress at work. This study therefore provides empirical evidence on the coping strategies adopted by teachers in managing occupational stress.

### **Statement of the Problem**

The study investigated the coping strategies adopted by secondary school teachers in managing stress. Specifically, the study attempted to find answers to this question: "what are the strategies adopted by teachers in managing stress at work?"

In addition, the following hypotheses were tested:

1. There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sex and stress management strategies.
2. There will be no significant relationship between teachers' qualification and stress management strategies.
3. There will be no significant relationship between teachers' location and stress manage-

ment strategies.

### **Methodology**

The population of the study consisted of all experienced teachers of secondary schools in Ogun State of Nigeria. These are teachers who have taught for ten years and above. The population was stratified into the four political divisions of the state. From this population, a total of 4000 teachers were sampled. However, 3466 teachers, representing 87% of the sample returned their completed questionnaires for the study. Out of this sample, 1485 were graduate teachers, while 1981 were non-graduates. Also, 2041 were male teachers, while 1,425 were females. The sample was also made up of 2031 teachers from the rural areas and 1434 from the urban areas.

The instrument used for the study was a questionnaire developed by Newton and Keenan (1985) and used by Gazieli (1993). The items of the questionnaire were generated from the four coping strategies identified by the authors. These were: active behavioural strategies; active cognitive strategies; inactive behavioural strategies and inactive cognitive strategies. The validity and reliability of the questionnaire to the Nigerian environment was determined by the researcher. The

instrument was administered on a group of teachers in another state in Nigeria. At the end of the exercise, seventeen of the twenty four items, were considered relevant, having alpha co-efficient values, ranging between 0.64 and 0.81, with an overall Cronbach co-efficient alpha value of 0.71 and significant beyond  $P < 0.001$ . The items were as follows:

- (a) inactive behavioural strategies; items 1 - 5

- (b) active behavioural strategies, items 6 - 10
- (c) inactive (escape) strategies, items 11 - 13
- (d) active cognitive strategies, items 14-17.

**Analysis of Data**

Question: What are the strategies adopted by secondary school teachers in managing stress at work? The results of the analysis are presented in Table 1

*Table 1  
Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Teachers in Managing Stress at Work*

S/N Strategies	Frequently	Once in a while	Never
1. I try to do physical exercises	41(0.01%)	192(0.05%)	3233(93%)
2. I try to keep away from this type of situation	3216 (93%)	190(0.05%)	60(0.01%)
3. I go to see a good film	-	54(0.01%)	3412(98%)
4. I do my best to get out of the situation gracefully	3333(96%)	101(0.02%)	32(0.00%)
5. I separate myself as much as possible from the people who created the situation because there is nothing I can do to change it	3329(96%)	101(0.02%)	36(0.01%)
6. I try to be very organised so I keep on top of things	3466(100%)	-	-

Table 1 Cont'd

S/N Strategies	Frequently	Once in a while	Never
7. I talk with people (other than my supervisor) who are involved	3466(100%)	-	-
8. I give extra attention to planning and scheduling	3466(100%)	-	-
9. I try to think of myself as some one who always comes through	3322(96%)	116(0.03%)	28(0.00%)
10. I devote more time and energy to doing my job	3462(100%)	04(0%)	-
11. I remind myself that work is not everything	3266(94%)	181(0.05%)	19(0.00%)
12. I try not to be concerned about it.	3333(96%)	112(0.03%)	21(0.00%)
13. I anticipate the negative consequence so that I am prepared for the worst	3324(96%)	116(0.03%)	26(0.00%)
14. I try to see the situation as an opportunity to learn and develop new skills	66(0.01%)	178(0.05%)	3222(93%)
15. I think about the challenge I can find in this situation	02(0.00%)	218(0.06%)	3246(94%)
16. I try to get additional people involved in the situation	65(0.01%)	89(0.03%)	3312(96%)
17. I decide what I think should be done and explain this to people who are affected	15(0.00%)	52(0.01%)	3399(98%)

Table 1 shows that the teachers frequently used the active behavioural strategies and the inactive (escape) strategies in managing stress. They never used the active cognitive strategies. The teachers also expressed mixed feelings about the inactive behavioural strategies.

*Hypothesis 1:*

There will be no significant relationship between teachers' sex and stress management strategies. The analysis is presented in Table 2

Table 2

*Relationship Between Teachers' Sex and Stress Management Strategies*

Respondents	Frequently	Once in a while	Never	Total	X <sup>2</sup> calculated	X <sup>2</sup> critical
Male teacher	916(629)	532(703)	593(709)	2041	467	5.99
Female teacher	152(439)	662(491)	611(495)	1425		
Total	1068	1194	1204	3466		

Table 3.

*Relationship Between Teachers' Qualification and Stress Management Strategies*

Respondents	Frequently	Once in a while	Never	Total	X <sup>2</sup> calculated	X <sup>2</sup> critical
Graduate teacher	561(484)	92(225)	832(777)	1485	166.01	5.99
Non-Graduate teacher	568(645)	432(299)	981(1036)	1981		
Total	1129	524	1813	3466		

Table 2 shows that the X<sup>2</sup> calculated is higher than the X<sup>2</sup> critical (467 > 5.99 and significant at P < 0.05). Therefore, there is a relationship between teacher's sex and stress management strategies.

*Hypothesis 2*

There will be no significant relationship between teachers' qualifications and stress management strategies. The results are presented in Table 3.



Table 3 also shows that hypothesis 2 is rejected.  $X^2$  calculated (166.01) is greater than  $X^2$  critical (5.99) at  $P < 0.05$ . Therefore, there is a significant relationship between teachers' qualifications and stress management strategies.

greater than 5.99 and significant beyond  $P < 0.05$ .

**Discussion**

The findings of this study showed that teachers frequently used active behavioural strategies to manage

*Table 4  
Relationship between Teachers' Location and Stress Management Strategies.*

Respondents	Frequently	Once in a while	Never	Total	$X^2$ calculated	$X^2$ critical
Rural teacher	297(885)	333(293)	1402(855)	2032		
Urban teachers	1212(624)	166(206)	56(603)	1434	1804.20	5.99
Total	1509	499	1458	3466		

*Hypothesis 3:*

There will be no significant relationship between teachers' location and stress management strategies.

The results of the analysis are presented in Table 4.

From Table 4, it is clear that hypothesis 3 is rejected. Therefore, there is a relationship between teachers' location and stress management strategies.  $X^2$  calculated, which is 1804.20 is

stress. The teachers preferred to appraise the problem, talk about the source of stress as well as seek information. This finding is in line with the study of Gazieli (1993), which discovered the Jewish teachers frequently using active behavioural strategies in coping with occupational stress. The adoption of the active behavioural strategies implies that the teacher organises himself very well in such a way that his duties will not be hampered by domestic chores. It

also means that even when he is stressed, the teacher feels that he could overcome the problem and consequently devotes time and energy to his professional duties.

The inactive (escape) strategies are also part of the strategies frequently used by teachers to manage stress. These strategies suggest that the teacher tries to escape and avoid the sources of stress. Here, whenever the teacher is stressed, he consoles himself with the fact that work is not everything and therefore feels less bothered. This is in line with the suggestion of Okorie (1997) that a positive attitude towards life in general is an essential prerequisite for any kind of stress management programme.

The active cognitive strategies are not popular among the teachers of secondary schools in Nigeria. Over 90% of them indicated that they never used the strategies (Table 1). The teachers probably felt that there was nothing challenging in stressful situations. It is because of this type of feeling that Iwuji (1990) enjoined that stress should be viewed as part of life which could be a means of achieving maturity in life. Thus, every stressful situation should be seen as a challenge to maturity, which must be handled constructively.

The teachers expressed some mixed feelings about the adoption of the inactive behavioural strategies. This is unlike Gaziel (1993), who discovered that Arab teachers usually employed inactive behavioural strategies in coping with stressful situations. The present finding further confirms the observation of Newton and Keenan (1985) that people do not approach each coping context anew, but rather bring to bear a preferred set of coping strategies that remain fixed across time and circumstances. Earlier, Folkman and Lazarus (1980) agreed that coping should be thought of as a dynamic process which could shift in nature from stage to stage of a stressful transaction.

Still on the adoption of the inactive behavioural strategies, the findings indicate that 93% of the teachers never engaged in physical exercises nor watched films in order to manage stress. This perhaps bothers on the fact that most workers in Nigeria do not engage in recreational activities due to ignorance of the value of recreation, lack of recreational facilities and skills, as well as economic difficulties (Mgbor, 1995). Recreational activities, according to Bucher (1985) will promote total health - physical, emotional, mental

and social, as well as provide avenues for abundant personal and family living. In addition, Adesanya and Ogunleye (1996) have argued that sports and relaxation are capable of preventing stress. In spite of these findings, the teachers frequently keep away from any situation that could cause any stressful situation, try to get out of the situation gracefully and endeavour to separate themselves from people who cause stressful situation (Table 1 ).

Furthermore, findings of this study indicate that teachers' sex, qualifications and location have significant relationship with the type of strategies adopted in managing stress. This agrees with Duyilemi's (1992) study, which discovered that sex and school location were significant correlates of occupational stress. But Duyilemi's, unlike the present study, found that job tenure or experience was not significantly correlated with the degree of occupational stress. However, while Duyilemi's study examined the sources and correlates of occupational stress among primary school teachers in Nigeria, the present study investigated the various strategies which secondary school teachers adopted in managing stress.

## Conclusion

The teacher is indispensable to the success of any educational system. But the neglect of teachers in the Nigerian society could be a source of worry and stress to the teacher. In the words of Peter Williams, Director of Education Department, Commonwealth Secretariat,

If teachers are so important and so numerous, why on earth are they so neglected? Why is it that they feel so isolated and uncared for, that they suffer indignities that other professions could not be asked to tolerate? (quoted by Taal, 1995).

To that extent, the government and society must show enough respect and recognition, not only to teachers, but to the teaching profession as a whole. Efforts should, therefore, be made to ameliorate the correlates of teachers' stress.

This study has shown that teachers in Nigeria employ different strategies in managing stress. The active cognitive strategies are not popular with the teachers. To that extent, teachers need to be orientated on the nature of life generally that stress is part of

human endeavour. Stress should be seen as a test of maturity which should be taken as a challenge. The way and manner teachers manage stressful situations will go a long way in determining their effectiveness on the job.

Teacher training institutions should develop relevant courses and programmes that will deal with topics of professional stress. Thus, right from training, teachers would imbibe the stressful realities of the teaching profession.

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