

Occupational Stress and Management Strategies of Secondary School principals in Cross River State, Nigeria

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Abstract

The study aimed at finding out sources and symptoms of occupational stress and management strategies of principals in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study with a population of 420 principals (304 males and 116 females) in secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria. Three research questions and two null hypotheses guided the study. Occupational Stress and Management Strategies of Principals Questionnaire containing 26 items was the instrument for data collection. Descriptive statistics were used in answering the research questions while t-test was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. From the research findings, results showed that poor working environment, pressure from teachers, etc. affect the performance of principals irrespective of gender. Persistent head ache, regular body pain and hypertension are principals' symptoms of stress. It was recommended that secondary schools principals should hire competent personnel to assist in administration, delegate duties, take regular exercises and sought counselling help among others to ease their stress and create enabling environment for better school administration.

Keywords: Management, Secondary education, Stress, Occupational stress, Management strategies.

1. Introduction

Secondary school principals in recent times, are faced with varied management issues that impede effective administration of the school. For instance, the school principal as the administrator of the school initiates, organizes and directs the activities of staff and students towards the achievement of school objectives as well as the development of positive school-home relationship (Van Velso and Orozco, 2006). The principal also administers the curriculum and teaching, pastoral care, discipline, continuous assessment and examinations, resource allocation, costing and planning, staff appraisal and relationship with the community. He also uses such practical skills necessary for achieving the goals of the school such as decision-making, negotiation, bargaining, communication, conflict management and running of meetings (Okereke, 2008). The multi-faceted job of the school principal tasks his coping abilities and puts him under stress.

Stress, according to Slyers (2011), means a general response which the human body makes to any demand 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. Oboegbulem (2007) defined stress as a process in which environmental events or forces, called stressors, threaten an organisms' existence and well-being and how the individual responds to such threat. It could also be seen as a feeling which occurs when an individual's working or living conditions or circumstances make demands beyond the individual's capacity to handle such situation physically or emotionally.

Contributing, Willis (2005), Melgosa (2004) and Ugoji and Isele (2009) stated that stress is also a condition of being subject to external forces or pressures which can either be good (eustress) or bad (distress). Eustress represents moderate and low stress levels and distress is frequently defined as high stress level. Principals who experience eustress will be able to meet job demands and this may engender positive work life (e.g., satisfaction and positive moral values) while principals who experience distress will not be able to fulfill job demands leading to dissatisfaction which affects an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work (Comish and Swindle, 1994; Fevre, 2003; Leka 2004).

The sources of stress, according to Adebola and Mukhtari (2008), could be occupational, domestic and economic. Occupational stress is a term used to define stress that is related to workplace. It occurs when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the work and individual's ability to carry out and complete these demands (Mahmood, Nudrat and Zahoor 2013). Occupational stress is also the experience of negative emotional stress such as frustration, worry, anxiety and depression attributed to work-related factors (Kyriacou, 2001). Such problems like work overload, pressure from parents and problems in curriculum implementation, lack of autonomy in execution of responsibilities, conflict between work and family responsibilities, poor academic performance of students, students' indiscipline and poor working environment constitute occupational stressors. Oboegbulem (2011) identified those stressors which are intrinsic to the job and which border on unpleasant working conditions as: total school working hours, physical or environmental factors like overpopulation of students; problems with the school plant; inadequate and ill-equipped teachers with lackadaisical attitudes towards work; students with poor academic background and negative attitude towards learning; parental ambivalence towards the educational well-being of their children; low motivation; inadequate resources to run

the school, low prospects of advancement, lack of job security and poor staff development programmes. Others are personal problems including role conflict; societal problems and pressures; financial problems and domestic worries (Adebola and Mukhtari, 2008). Occupational stress can eventually affect both physical and emotional well-being if not managed effectively. Lack of economic and financial resources to run the school constitutes economic stressors

Stress on the principal, according to Willis (2005), could lead to negative behaviour and thoughts, problems of emotions and feelings and physical health and may hinder effective school administration. Mariammal, Amutha and Sornaraj (2012) stated that stress manifests in the form of ailments or chronic diseases like hypertension, stroke, headache and diabetes as well as regular body pain. Some people experience symptoms such as suppression of the reproductive system, anxiety, aggressiveness, indigestion, stomach ache, pains, dizziness, and rapid heartbeat. Chronic stress creates muscle tension, fatigue, constipation and arthritis (Siani, 2007). There is, therefore, the need for management strategies to reduce stress on principals.

Management means the harnessing of human and material resources to achieve organizational goals and objectives through staff motivation. According to Franklin (2002), management is defined as a distinct process consisting of activities of planning, organizing and controlling performance to accomplish stated objectives with the use of human and other resources.

Stress management, according to Hornby (2010), is a skill that is used to deal with situations that are stressful and may eventually lead to burnout. Oluchi and Nwamuo (2013) added that stress management is the amelioration of stress, especially those that are chronic and capable of affecting one's physical, psychological and environmental state. Measures taken to manage harsh conditions in order to maintain a state of psychological or physiological equilibrium are termed stress management strategies (Uko, 2012).

Stress management strategies, according to Oboegbulem (2004), are coping actions, behaviours or attitudes which an individual exhibits when faced with certain psychological and social demands that tax the individual's adaptive resources.

2. Coping strategies of Occupational Stress

Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) listed the following as strategies which can be used to cope with occupational stress by secondary school principals:

- ❖ utilizing colleagues as human resource
- ❖ developing close staff relationship,
- ❖ improving team management
- ❖ adopting problem solving approach with teachers and
- ❖ hiring competent personnel to assist in administration,, among others.

When principals, either male or female gender, do not utilize the opportunity of stress management strategies aforementioned, they stand the risk of being stressed up thereby leading to low productivity and performance in the workplace. The term gender is conceived as those roles that distinguish males from females as a result of interaction with others (Butler, 1990). In this study, the focus is on their abilities to cope with stressful conditions in the office. Due to the difference in gender roles, male principals are assumed to cope better in stressful situations than female principals as a result of their position in the family as child bearers and home makers. The issue of combining work (as a principal) and family responsibilities may heighten stress for the females while the male principals may have a better opportunity of utilizing more time for office work than the female principals.

Study Purpose

The purpose of the present study was to determine stress management strategies of the occupational stress of secondary school principals in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to identify the sources of occupational stress amongst principals of secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria, Find out the symptoms of stress manifested by secondary school principals in Cross River State, Nigeria and ascertain the coping strategies for stress management by secondary school principals in Cross River State, Nigeria..

Method

Descriptive survey research design which aims at collecting data and describing the characteristics, features or facts about a given population, in a systematic manner was employed according to Nworgu (2006). The opinion of secondary school principals and vice principals was sought on occupational stress and management strategies. The study was conducted in all the secondary schools in Cross River State, Nigeria, which has three education zones, namely: Calabar, Ikom and Ogoja. The population for the study comprised of all secondary school principal in Cross River State numbering 420 (304 males and 116 females) (Cross River State Secondary Education Board, 2014). The whole population was used without sampling due to the fact that the population is manageable.

The instrument used for data collection was a four-point scale researcher developed questionnaire titled “Occupational stress and management strategies of principals’ questionnaire” (OSMSPQ) with 26 items arranged in three clusters.

The response modes were, Strongly Agree (SA) - 4 Points, Agree (A) - 3 Points, Disagree (D) - 2 Points and Strongly Disagree (SD) - 1 Point. The instrument has two sections namely, section ‘A’ which is concerned with personal data of the respondents and section ‘B’ which contains 26 items, in three clusters, on occupational stress, manifestations of stress and management strategies of principals in secondary schools. The instrument was face-validated by three experts to determine its adequacy, appropriateness for the study and language clarity of the items in addressing the research questions, bearing in mind the purpose of the study. The corrections and inputs formed the basis for the modification of the items on the instrument.

In order to ensure the reliability of the instrument, a trial test was carried out on seventy (70) principals in Ebonyi State, Nigeria. Internal consistency reliability was computed using Cronbach Alpha (α) and an overall reliability index of 0.81 was obtained. Data collected were analyzed using the mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions while t-test statistics was used to test the null hypothesis at 0.05 level of significance. A score of 2.50 and above was taken to mean that the respondent is in agreement with the option while a mean score of 2.49 and below showed disagreement to the items of the instrument.

Results

The result is presented in the tables below in line with the research questions that guided the study.

Research Question 1

What are the sources of occupational stress amongst principals of secondary schools? The results of the responses are shown in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Responses of Male and Female Principals on Sources of Occupational Stress among Principals of Secondary Schools.

S/N	What are the sources of occupational stress among principals of secondary schools in Cross River State?	\bar{X}_1	Male n = 304		\bar{X}_2	Female n = 116	
			SD ₁	DEC ₁		SD ₂	DEC ₂
1.	Poor working environment is a source of occupational stress	3.76	0.58	Agree	3.58	0.64	Agree
2.	The problem of implementing the curriculum planned by non-experts causes stress	3.30	0.59	Agree	3.33	0.65	Agree
3.	Pressure from teachers is a source of occupational stress	3.35	0.70	Agree	3.34	0.73	Agree
4.	An overpopulated school a principal finds himself can cause stress	3.26	0.68	Agree	3.21	0.81	Agree
5.	Conflict demands and roles between work and home causes stress	3.29	0.76	Agree	3.33	0.60	Agree
6.	Lack of autonomy in the execution of responsibilities in school by the principal causes stress	3.32	0.64	Agree	3.22	0.65	Agree
7.	Excess work load for the principal is an occupational stress	3.16	0.69	Agree	3.29	0.77	Agree
8.	Economic and financial problem is a stressor to the school principal	3.42	0.85	Agree	3.36	0.80	Agree
9.	Pressure from parents association on school community relation is a stressor	3.03	0.76	Agree	3.18	0.63	Agree
10.	Poor social image of the principal is a source of occupational stress of the teaching profession	3.13	0.91	Agree	3.25	0.72	Agree

Key: X_1 - Mean for male university graduates, SD₁ - Standard deviation for male university graduates, DEC₁ - Decision for male university graduates, X_2 - Mean for female university graduates, SD₂ - Standard deviation for female university graduates, DEC₂ - Decision for female university graduates, n - Sample

The results in Table 1 show that both male and female principals endorsed all the items, with mean scores of 2.50 and above, as sources of occupational stress which directly affect the performance of principals leading to low productivity in the management of secondary schools.

Research Question 2

What are the symptoms of occupational stress manifested by secondary school principals? The results of the responses are shown in Table 2.

Table 2: Mean Responses of Male and Female Principals on Symptoms of Occupational Stress Manifested by Secondary School Principals in Cross River State

S/N	What are the Symptoms of Occupational Stress Manifested on Secondary School Principals in Cross River State	Male n = 304			Female n = 116		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	DEC ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	DEC ₂
11.	Persistent headache is a symptom of stress that affects the principal	3.49	0.81	Agree	3.26	0.90	Agree
12.	Heart attack as a result of marital problems at home is a symptom of stress	3.12	0.76	Agree	3.23	0.66	Agree
13.	Reduction in effectiveness in administration is a symptom of stress	3.28	0.75	Agree	3.23	0.70	Agree
14.	Aggressive behaviour to staff and students is a symptom of stress	3.20	0.80	Agree	3.30	0.78	Agree
15.	Regular body pain is a symptom of stress	3.27	0.81	Agree	3.23	0.70	Agree
16.	Hypertension is also a symptom of stress	3.16	0.76	Agree	3.25	0.76	Agree

The results from table 2 above are also indicative of the fact that both male and female principals are of the opinion that the above items are symptoms of occupational stress which directly affects the performance of principals in secondary schools in Cross River State as all the items have a mean score which is above 2.50.

Research Question 3

What are the coping strategies for stress management by secondary school principals in Cross River State?

The research question sought to find out the coping strategies for stress management by secondary school Principals in Cross River State, hence, it was answered using mean and standard deviation as shown in table 3.

Table 3

Mean Responses of Male and Female Principals on Coping Strategies of stress management by principals of secondary schools in Cross River State

S/N	What are the Coping Strategies of stress management by principals of secondary schools in Cross River State?	Male n = 304			Female n = 116		
		\bar{X}_1	SD ₁	DEC ₁	\bar{X}_2	SD ₂	DEC ₂
17.	Delegation of duties is a way of managing occupational stress	3.48	0.88	Agree	3.47	0.75	Agree
18.	Developing close staff relationship reduces occupational stress	3.20	0.77	Agree	3.25	0.68	Agree
19.	Improving team management is a source of stress management	3.26	0.76	Agree	3.40	0.70	Agree
20.	Hiring competent personnel to assist in administration reduces stress	3.28	0.84	Agree	3.36	0.73	Agree
21.	Taking balanced diet could help to reduce stress as a management strategy	3.15	0.86	Agree	3.16	0.82	Agree
22.	Taking regular exercise is a source of stress management strategy	3.20	0.81	Agree	3.21	0.69	Agree
23.	Spending leisure time at home with family reduces stress	3.20	0.81	Agree	3.19	0.80	Agree
24.	Sharing problem related to job-stress reduces stress	3.18	0.83	Agree	3.30	0.64	Agree
25.	Relaxation breathing technique is a source of stress management	3.05	0.93	Agree	3.21	0.82	Agree
26.	Societal recognition and placement in the society reduces stress	2.89	1.00	Agree	2.99	0.84	Agree

From the results in Table 3, both male and female principals agree that all the items 17-26, with mean scores of 2.50 and above, are coping strategies for stress management by secondary school principals.

Table 4: t-Test Analysis of Responses to Symptoms of Occupational Stress Manifested by Principals and Vice Principals of Secondary Schools.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-calc	Sig. (2tailed)
Male	304	19.64	3.6	418	1.457	.146
Female	116	20.04	5.3	418		

The analysis of the results shown in Table 4 indicated that the calculated t value of 1.457 is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of principals and vice principals regarding the symptoms of occupational stress manifested by them due to stressful working conditions in secondary schools is upheld.

Table 5: t-Test Analysis of Responses to the Application of Coping Strategies for Management of Occupational Stress by Male and Female Principals in Secondary Schools.

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	Df	t-calc	Sig. (2tailed)
Male	304	31.90	5.2	418	.703	.482
Female	116	32.52	2.8	418		

The analysis of the results shown in Table 5 indicated that the calculated t value of 0.703 is not significant at 0.05 level of significance. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female principals regarding the application of coping strategies for the management of occupational stress in secondary schools in Cross River State is upheld.

3. Discussion

Sources of occupational stress among principals of secondary schools.

The results of the data analyses on sources of occupational stress among principals of secondary schools showed that over populated school, inadequate or lack of school plant, societal problems and poor funding of the schools by the government are sources of stress for both male and female principals in the process of carrying out administrative duties in the school. This finding is in agreement with the assertion of Adebola and Mukhtari (2008) that environmental problems (stressors) like overpopulation of students; problems with the school plant, ill- equipped and inadequate teachers to cope with the workload, students with poor academic backgrounds and negative attitude towards learning, poor funding and parental ambivalence towards the educational wellbeing of their children among others, are stressors for the principals.

On the symptoms of stress manifested by secondary school principals, it was found in the present study that both male and female principals are of the opinion that such symptoms include regular body pain, persistent headache and hypertension, among others. This finding is in line with the findings of Mariammal, Amutha and Sornaraj (2012) who reported that stresses manifest in form of physical ailments or chronic diseases like hypertension, stroke, headache and diabetes as well as regular body pain as a result of work overload in strenuous managerial activities.

In order to manage stress, both male and female principals are of the opinion that hiring of competent personnel to assist in administration, delegation of duties and taking regular exercises are coping strategies for stress management by secondary school principals. This finding lends credence to Oboegbulem and Onwurah (2011) who stipulated that utilizing colleagues as human resource, developing close staff relationship, improving team management, adopting problem- solving approach with teachers and hiring competent personnel to assist in administration are stress management strategies.

There is, however, no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female principals to the symptoms of occupational stress manifested by them due to stressful situations in the work place. This is shown by the t-test analysis result on Table 4 which revealed that the calculated t-value of 1.46 is less than the critical or table value of 1.96.

The t-test analysis on Table 5 revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean responses of male and female principals regarding the coping strategies to manage occupational stress. This is indicated by the calculated t value of 0.70 which is less than the table or critical value of 1.96.

4. Conclusion

Based on the findings and discussions of the study, the following conclusions are drawn. Both male and female principals are stressed up by overpopulated schools, inadequate or lack of school plant, societal problems and poor funding of the schools by the government for effective administration. The symptoms of stress include regular body pain, persistent headache and hypertension, among others, that adversely affect their performance. The coping strategies for stress management by secondary schools principals include hiring of competent personnel to assist in administration, delegation of duties and taking regular exercises among others. Counselling help should also be sought by school administrators to ease their stress and create enabling environment for better school administration. It should be noted that counselling is a helping profession that assists individuals to understand themselves and the world of work to be able to adjust better in relation with the work itself and

relationship with colleagues.

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