

Causes of Occupational Stress and Coping Strategies Adopted by Secondary School Principals in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State, Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

Secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state perform multi-faceted tasks which seems to result to occupational stress. This occupational stress appears to cause principals' pains, unpleasantness, restlessness, dizziness, tension, fatigue discomfort among others which adversely affect their well-being and also interfere with the performance of their managerial roles in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. This prompted this study to ascertain causes of occupational stress and coping strategies adopted by secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. Two research questions guided the study and two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. The study adopted descriptive survey research design. The population of the study comprised all the 60 public secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state and all were used for the study due to the relatively and manageable size. A 17-item researchers developed instrument titled "Causes of Occupational Stress and Principals Coping Strategies Questionnaire (COSPCSQ)" was used for data collection. The instrument was duly validated by three experts who are lecturers in Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki and Cronbach alpha which yielded an overall coefficient of 0.83 was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The researchers with the help of two research assistants adopted a direct approach in collecting data for the study. Mean and standard deviation was used in answering the research questions, while *t*-test was used in testing the hypotheses. The findings of the study among others revealed that excess work load, indiscipline inadequate facilities in the school, multiplicity of education programme and adapting to innovation in school curriculum among others are causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals. It also indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their occupational stress coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. Based on the findings, it was among others recommended that there is need for the government to employ more administrative staff so as to reduce the workload of principals. Conclusion was drawn.

Keywords: Occupational stress, coping strategies and principals.

1. INTRODUCTION

Principals as the chief executive of secondary schools perform multi-faceted tasks. These tasks range from curriculum planning, maintaining discipline, supervising staff, allocating resources, providing counseling services, budgeting, accounting, controlling both human, material and time resources among others. In addition to the daily rigors of maintaining the operations of school, principals face a variety of taxing issues on regular basis including meeting State and Federal mandates, criticism from parents, large amount of paperwork, funding cuts, escalating accountability, troubled students and frustrated teachers (De leon cited in Lori, 2011). Secondary school principals seem to experience stress in the course of performing these numerous tasks.

Stress is a condition of strain that has a direct bearing on emotions and physical conditions of a person (Manduku, Koech & Chepkirui, 2016). Stress is a feeling which occur when an individual's working or living conditions or circumstances make demands beyond the individual's capacity to handle such situation physically or

emotionally (Anyanwu, Ezenwaji, Okenjom & Enyi, 2015). In the context of this study, stress is the unpleasant feeling that one experience as a result of performing tasks beyond one's physical, mental and emotional capacity. In the coursing of performing ones job, the individual is bound to experience occupational stress.

Reddy and Anuradha (2013) defined occupation stress as an employee's mental state aroused by a job situation or a combination of situations perceived as presenting excessive and divergent demands. Occupational stress is an experience of unpleasant emotional or physical states attributed to work related factor. Several work related factors may cause occupational stress among secondary school principals in Enugu State and this could be inadequate school infrastructure, indiscipline, excessive work load, external interference in school activities, and inadequate support from school-community among others. Supporting this, Uba-Mbibi and Nwamuo (2013) reported that causes of stress among principals in public schools are students indiscipline, excessive workload, inadequate facilities and large classes. Individual who experienced occupational stress might also use different coping strategies either to avoid it totally or to ameliorate it in order to minimize its negative effects in their (Hagos, 2015).

Stress coping strategies are techniques adopted by principals in dealing with stress in an appropriate manner. These coping strategies could be physical or psychological. Performing of duties in order of priorities, delegating of authority and responsibility to members of staff, regular exercise, undergoing medical checkup and formulating policies to maintain discipline, maintain coordinal relationship among members of staff in the school are stress coping strategies. Buttressing this, Ekundayo and Kolawole (2013) indicated that the stress coping strategies include maintaining coordinal relationship with colleagues, maintaining discipline, enjoying uninterrupted sound sleep as well as attending to problems as at when due.

Due to the difference in gender roles, male principals are assumed to cope better in stressful situations than female as a result of female principals' position as child bearers and markers(Anyanwu, Ezenwaji, Okenjom & Enyi, 2015). Continuing, they asserted that the issue of combing 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. The discourse makes gender, an essential variable in this study.

Statement of the Problem

Secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State perform multi-faceted tasks which seems to result to occupational stress. This occupational Stress appears to cause principals' pains, unpleasantness, restlessness, dizziness, tension, fatigue discomfort among others which adversely affect their well-being and also interfere with the performance of their managerial roles in secondary schools in Nsukka Education zone of Enugu State. Consequently, it seems to have lead to principals' inability to meet deadlines, loss of concentration and absenteeism. It is in the light of the above that the problem of this study is to ascertain the causes of occupational stress and coping strategies adopted by secondary school principals in Nsukka Education Zone of Enugu State.

Purpose of the Study

The main purpose of the study is to ascertain the causes of occupational stress and coping strategies adopted by secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. Specifically, the study sought to determine the:

1. Causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.
2. Occupational stress coping strategies adopted among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study.

1. What are the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State?
2. What are the occupational stress coping strategies adopted among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.
2. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their occupational stress coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State

2. METHOD

The descriptive survey design was adopted for this study. According to Nworgu (2015), descriptive survey is the design which aims at collecting data on, and describing in a systematic manner the characteristic features or facts about a given population. Descriptive survey research design fits into this study because it aims at collecting data from representative of the target population for the purpose of describing in systematic manner the fact on the causes of occupation stress and coping strategies adopted by secondary school principals in Enugu state. The population of the study comprised all the 60 public secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state and all were used for the study due to relative size and manageable size. A 17-item researchers developed questionnaire titled “Causes of Occupational Stress and Principals Coping Strategies Questionnaire (COSPCSQ)” was used for data collection. To ensure the instrument validity, three experts who are lecturers, two in the Department of Educational Foundations and one in Measurement and Evaluation in the Department of Science Education, all in Faculty of Education, Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki were consulted. The experts, after examining the instrument made some corrections on precisions of items and ambiguity of statements. Their comments were used to modify the final copy of the questionnaire used for the study. The reliability of the instrument was determined using Cronbach alpha by trial testing 20 copies of the instrument to principals in Obollo-Afor education zone of Enugu state, who were not part of the population of the study. Both Nsukka and Obollo-Afor education zones have same characteristics and this justify the choice of Obollo-Afor education zone for the reliability test. A coefficient values of 0.81 and 0.83 were obtained for part A and B respectively. The overall coefficient value of 0.82 was adjudged high enough for the instrument usability. This is in line with Green (2007) who recommended that co-efficient value of 0.80 or above is adequate for any research work.

The researchers administered the copies of the questionnaire directly to the respondents with the help of two research assistants who were briefed on the nature and purpose of the study in order to clarify and guide the respondents in filling the distributed copies of questionnaire. The distributed and completed copies were collected on the spot and follow up visits was made where the respondents could not submit on the spot. The distribution and collection of the copies of the questionnaire lasted for 3 weeks. At the end of the exercise, 54 copies of the questionnaire were properly completed and retrieved and this indicated 90 percent return. The data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation for answering the research questions. In answering the research questions in this study, mean ratings that falls below 2.50 will be taken as disagreement and any mean rating of 2.50 or above will be taken to indicate agreement. T-test was used to test the null hypotheses. In testing the null hypotheses, if t-calculated is equal to or greater than t-critical at 0.05 level of significance and the degree of freedom, the null hypothesis is rejected, but if otherwise, it is rejected.

3. RESULTS

Research Question 1: What are the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State?

Table 1: Mean ratings and standard deviation scores of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

S/ N	ITEMS Indicate the underlisted that cause you stress;	MALE PRINCIPALS (N = 43)			FEMALE PRINCIPALS (N = 11)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
1	Excess work load	2.53	1.08	Agree	2.72	1.01	Agree
2	Indiscipline behaviour among students and students	2.61	1.01	Agree	2.54	1.14	Agree

3	Inadequate facilities in the school	2.58	1.14	Agree	2.58	1.11	Agree
4	External interferences in the school activities	2.52	1.18	Agree	2.55	1.09	Agree
5	Increase in students enrolment	2.65	.98	Agree	2.65	1.15	Agree
6	Management of numerous school record	2.45	1.11	Disagree	2.40	1.03	Disagree
7	Multiplicity of educational programmes	2.59	1.10	Agree	2.60	1.11	Agree
8	Adapting to innovation in school curriculum	2.52	1.19	Agree	2.58	1.15	Agree
Mean of Means'		2.56	1.10	Agree	2.58	1.10	Agree

Data analysis in Table 1 shows that apart from item 6 with mean rating below 2.50 indicating disagreement, the rest of the items have mean ratings above 2.50 indicating that the principals agreed that the items are the causes of occupational stress. This implies that excess work load, indiscipline behaviour among staff and students, inadequate facilities in the school, multiplicity of education programme and adapting to innovation in school curriculum among others are causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. The standard deviation scores of 1.10 and 1.10 indicated that the male and female principals responses were little clustered. The mean of means' rating which is above 2.50 indicates that almost all the items are the causes of occupational stress among male and female secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state.

Research Question 2: What are the occupational stress coping strategies adopted among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State?

Table 2: Mean ratings and standard deviation scores of male and female principals on occupational stress coping strategies adopted among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State

S/ N	ITEMS Indicate your stress coping strategies	MALE PRINCIPALS (N = 43)			FEMALE PRINCIPALS (N = 11)		
		Mean	SD	Remark	Mean	SD	Remark
9	Carrying out duties in order of priorities	2.57	.88	Agree	2.61	1.01	Agree
10	Delegating of authority and responsibility to members of staff	2.61	1.19	Agree	2.50	1.14	Agree
11	Engaging in regular morning exercise	2.39	1.00	Disagree	2.20	1.11	Disagree
12	Having adequate sleep immediately after daily school work	2.40	1.38	Disagree	2.53	1.09	Agree
13	Hiring competent staff to assist reduce administrative work load	2.45	.98	Disagree	2.42	1.15	Disagree

14	Watching television immediately after the school hour	2.34	.87	Disagree	2.54	1.03	Disagree
15	Taking of alcohol before immediately after school hour	2.29	.56	Disagree	1.18	1.11	Disagree
16	Undergoing regular medical check up	2.56	1.09	Agree	2.51	1.15	Agree
17	Formulating policies to maintain discipline in the school	2.65	.79	Agree	2.59	.87	Agree
Mean of Means'		2.47	.97	Agree	2.34	1.07	Agree

The result of data analysis in Table 2 indicated that both male and female principals agreed that items 9, 10, 16 and 17 are stress coping strategies they adopt. Both male and female principals disagreed that items 11, 13, 14 and 15 are stress coping strategies they adopt. While male principals disagreed that they adopt item 12 as one of the stress coping strategies they adopt, female principals agreed to the adoption of the item. The overall standard deviation scores of .97 and 1.07 for male and female principals respectively indicate closer disparity and this means that the male and female principals' responses were little clustered. The mean of means' which is below 2.50 indicates inadequate adoption of the stress coping strategies by male and female secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state.

Testing the Null Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

Table 3: *t-test of significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.*

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal.	t-crit.	df	Decision
Male	43	2.56	1.10	0.05	1.96	52	Not Significant
Female	11	2.58	1.10				

From Table 3, the t-calculated value of 0.05 is less than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significant and for 52 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis is not significant. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

Ho₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their occupational stress coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State

Table 4: *t-test of significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the occupational stress coping strategies in secondary schools in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.*

Variables	N	X	SD	t-cal.	t-crit.	df	Decision
Male	43	2.47	.97	0.37	1.96	52	Not Significant
Female	11	2.34	1.07				

From Table 4, the t-calculated value of 0.37 is less than t-critical value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significant and for 52 degree of freedom. Thus, the null hypothesis is not significant. Therefore, there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their occupational stress coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

4. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The result of data analysis presented in Table revealed that excess work load, indiscipline behaviour among staff and students, inadequate facilities in the school, multiplicity of education programme and adapting to innovation in school curriculum among others are causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. This finding is supported by the earlier report of Okah and Nyenwe (2013) which revealed that lack of facilities and equipment, general societal problems and poor organization climate are the sources of stress to the school principals. The finding of this study also revealed that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. This contradicts the earlier report of Antoniou, Aikaterini and Ntalla (2013) which revealed that female teachers experience higher level of stress than their male counterpart. This contradiction could be attributed to geographically location difference and also the respondents used in both studies.

The finding of this study also revealed that carrying out duties in order of priorities, and delegating of authority and responsibility to members of staff, undergoing medical checkup and formulating policies to maintain discipline in the school are stress coping strategies adopted by male and female secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. This is in agreement with the finding of Ekundayo and Kolawole (2013) which indicated that the stress coping strategies include maintaining coordinational relationship with colleagues, maintaining discipline, enjoying uninterrupted sound sleep as well as attending to problems as when due. This finding is also supported by Uba-Mbibi and Nwamuo (2013) who reported that the strategies adopted by the principals to manage stress are carrying out duties in order of priorities, participation in physical exercise, associating socially with colleagues, sharing problems with other and thinking objectively about a situation and being self-control among others. Notwithstanding, both male and female secondary school principals disagreed that hiring competent staff to assist reduce administrative work load, taking alcohol and watching television programmes are stress coping strategies in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. The result of this study also indicated that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on their occupational stress coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State. This finding is supported by the earlier report of Anyanwu, Ezenwaji, Okenjom, and Enyi (2015) which revealed that there was 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.

5. CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it is concluded that excess work load, indiscipline behaviour among staff and students, inadequate facilities in the school, multiplicity of education programme and adapting to innovation in school curriculum among others are causes of occupational stress among secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. There is inadequate adoption of the stress coping strategies by male and female secondary school principals in Nsukka education zone of Enugu state. There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of male and female principals on the causes of occupational stress and coping strategies in secondary school in Nsukka education zone of Enugu State.

6. RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were made:

1. There is need for the government to employ more administrative staff so as to reduce the workload of principals.
2. Government and stakeholders should enhance the provision of school facilities so as minimize stress in administering secondary school.
3. The principals should take any legal disciplinary measures to control the conduct or behaviour of staff and students in the school.
4. Ministry of Education should organize workshops and seminars for principals in order educate them on stress coping strategies.

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