

Gender Differences in Perceived Sources of Stress: A Cross Sectional Survey of Public Secondary School Teachers in Ebonyi State, Nigeria

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Abstract

Individuals, especially teachers, who work in serving professions involving interaction with other people, may be more liable to suffer psychological discomfort as a result of stress. However, the level of stress suffered may be dependent on the sources that generate the stress. The study, therefore, was conducted to determine the perceived sources of stress among male and female public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state. The descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of the study was 4,360. A sample size of 436 (male 220, female 216) teachers participated in the study. This sample size was arrived following the suggestions of Nwana (2014) that if the population of a study is in a few thousands, 10% could be used. A self-developed questionnaire titled: Sources of Stress Questionnaire (SSQ) was used as instrument for data collection. The instrument was subjected to face validation by five experts in the field of Health Education and Psychology. The reliability of the instrument was computed using Cronbach alpha procedure which yielded a coefficient of 0.81. Data collected for the study were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. Independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05. The results revealed that the public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state studied had a high level stress which was perceived to have been generated by administrative-related, workload-related, environmental-related and economic-related sources. It was recommended that government should improve the working condition of the teachers in order to scale down their stress levels.

Keywords: Gender, Stress, Secondary School teachers, Public

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1. Introduction

All living human species experience stress. Humans tolerate stress despite their age, gender, employment and of course; their financial background. Stress is defined as a process in which environmental events or forces called stressors, threaten an organism's existence and wellbeing, and how the individual responds to such threat (Oboegbulem, 2007). In Nigeria, Agboli and Ukaegbu (2006) observed that working in the south eastern parts carries an elevated risk for occupational stress. Therefore, in Nigeria there is a need for stress sources to be given due attention and taken seriously in order to ascertain their root causes and chart a way for possible reduction.

Lucky (2014) reported that teachers in Nigeria have reported series of health problems and reduction in work posed by stress. It pressures negatively on the organization and the individual's physical and mental system. This could result to poor academic performance of students, absenteeism among teachers, high rate of accidents, unprincipled behaviour, displeasure and sickness. In Ebonyi state, high rate of absenteeism among secondary school teachers has been observed while on duty, this might lead to poor quality of teaching and however lead to poor academic performance of students. It is in the light of the above that this study investigated perceived sources of stress among male and female public secondary schools' teachers in Ebonyi state.

Several researchers have reported different sources of stress among secondary school teachers. Such sources include, but not limited to administrative sources, workload related sources, interpersonal relations sources, environmental sources and economy related sources (Nwimo, 2006, Nwimo & Onwunaka, 2015). Sources of stress or stressors can be short-term or long-term in nature. Common acute stressors include noise, high technology effects as well as thoughts about a threat or unsafe event, while chronic stressors involve ongoing stressful events that are long-term and where the urge to act is suppressed.

Findings (Ofoegbu & Nwadiani, 2006) revealed significant sources in administration induce stress among teachers. These include strike and school interruption, delay and irregular payment of salary, lack of instructional facilities, preparation of examination results, invigilation of examination, campus militancy, high cost of living, office accommodation, lack of research facilities, lack of annual leave/ holiday and under funding of education. Management role expectations and homework interface were also identified

(Alexandros, Matilyn & Cary, 2003). Poor working conditions, poor motivation, external factors and low status were identified as reliable inducers of stress (Lam & Punch, 2001; Boyd & Wylie, 1994). Arguing, Blix, Cruise, Mitchell and Blix (2004) posited that limited resources and shortage of time, slow progress in career advancement, poor faculty communication, professional disillusionment and inadequate salaries were directly related to pressure experienced by teachers.

Ahsan, Abdullah, Fie and Alam (2010) identified workload related stress to include work overload, homework interface, roles ambiguity and performance pressure. Overload is a concept used to imply an over challenging work load. Nwimo (2005) noted that the total demand on time and energy are too great for teachers to perform the roles adequately or comfortably. He advocated that teachers who perceived that their workload is more than they can handle, would experience negative emotions, fatigue and tension and noted that this situation may be more for men than women. These negative feelings, according to Aminah and Maznah (2004), would have same negative effects on family life and on students' performance. Ahmdu, Changiz, Masiello and Brommels (2007) included workload, conflict, demands from colleagues and supervisors, incompatible demands from different personal and organization roles, inadequate resources for appropriate performance, insufficient competency to the demands of the role, inadequate autonomy to make decision on different tasks and feeling of underutilization s sources of workload stress.

Interpersonal demands are pressures created by other employees. Lack of social support from colleagues, and poor interactions with colleagues, relationship with students, school management, principal and non-tutorial staff in the school and poor interpersonal relationship can cause stress, especially among employees with a high social need (Abouserie, 2016). Interpersonal relationship in stress refers to those stresses that occur between employees and the organization. Struggling to maintain a balance between home and work life also causes of stress. Considerate superiors and co-workers contribute tremendously to job satisfaction of colleagues since they assist the individuals in achieving their goals. On the other hand, poor relationship causes stress and creates more tension and work stress.

Environmental uncertainty influences the design of an organization's structure, it also influences stress level among teachers in the school. The stress experienced by teachers has equally undesirable consequences for their work environment, since it affects the learning environment and interferes with the achievement of educational goals (Van Tonder & Williams, 2009). Political uncertainties like threats and changes can induce stress such as poor work environment. Other environmental sources of stress include inadequate physical facilities in schools, poor working conditions, and pressures to avoid errors or complete tasks within a limited time, accident, work overload, a demanding and insensitive boss and unpleasant co-workers. Task demand factors are related to a person's job, job security in the community where school is located. It includes the design of the individual's job, working conditions, and the physical work layout. Working in an overcrowded class room or in a visible location where noise and interruptions are constant can increase anxiety and stress (Nwimo, 2006). Role demands relate to pressures placed on a person as a function of the particular role he or she plays in the organization. Role conflicts create expectations that may be hard to reconcile or satisfy.

The economy-related sources of stress may be in the form of: career development. This is emphasizing that in the early stages of ones career, which may be regarded by significant progression through salary increase and promotions. However, as one's career develops and as one becomes older on the job, progress becomes slower and eventually retards. This can be a cause of stress as little now comes into the pocket in terms of money, challenges and status. When the economy is contracting, people become anxious about their job security. Other sources of stress, such as high self-expectations, constant interaction with the ever changing world is the basis for stress while some people are able to withstand the stress of life; others in similar circumstances burnout psychologically and wear out physically. These differential reactions are the rules which govern the impact of the stressor on individual have been the focus of many psychologists. Agai-Demjaha, Karadzinska Bislimovska, and Mijakoski (2015) reported that problems of missed work days and other occupational difficulties among university administrators were less related to the number of intensities of job stressors than how well the job situation allowed the administrators to use their preferred way of interacting with others and display other aspects of their leadership style. In the Nigeria school system, Nwimo (2005) observed that stressor elements result from the school and out of school influences.

Problems at work are more strongly associated with health complaints than to any other life stressor – more so than even financial problems or family problems. Studies (Sauter, Hurrell, Murphy & Levi 1997; Nwimo & Ugwu, 2008) suggest that psychologically, demanding jobs that allow employees to give little control over the work process increase the risk of cardiovascular disease. On the basis of research by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health and many other organizations, it is widely believed that job stress increases the risk for development of back and upper-extremely musculoskeletal disorders.

There is no doubt that stress can be very harmful to both the individual and the organization. To this, Armson (1997) noted that the results of unrelieved stress on the individual and on business are basically worrisome. The results may be higher accident rates, sickness, absence, inefficiency, damaged relationships

with clients and colleagues, high staff turnover, early retirement on medical grounds, and even premature death. It is devastating to the individual and damaging to the business costs and healthy workforce is greater than ever. It is in everyone's interest to tackle the taboo on talking about emotional problems because it is this which inhabits individuals from seeking help.

There have also been a number of highly published reports of successful legal claims against the effects of stress. Understandably, however, there is also a high level skepticism about the amount of emphasis placed on stress, and a number of press and other articles feature the 'myth' of work stress. An interesting report from the Institute for Social and Economic Research suggests that claims of workplace pressure may be misplaced. Levels of job satisfaction and mental distress vary systemically to the day of the week on which respondents are interviewed and stress appears to disappear on Friday and Saturday when genuine dissatisfaction is found, it tended to be because employees were working too few or too many hours. Against these backdrops, this study became justifiable to investigate gender differences in perceived sources of stress among public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state, Nigeria

2. Methods

Descriptive survey research design was adopted to accomplish the purpose of the study. This study was carried out in Ebonyi state. Ebonyi state was created from the old Enugu and Abia States on 1st October 1996. It is one of the states in south eastern zone of the Federal Republic of Nigeria (Ebonyi State Ministry of Information, 2022). Ebonyi state occupies a land mass of 5539 square kilometers with a population of 2,176,947 people (Federal Republic of Nigeria, 2009). The state lies on approximately latitude of 7° 30 east to 8° 30 east and longitude 5° 40 north to 6° 45 north. It is bordered in the east by Cross River state, in the north by Benue state, in west by Enugu state and in the south by Abia state. The state is divided into three education zones namely, Abakaliki, Onueke and Afikpo.

The state has thirteen local government areas (LGAs) which encompass: Abakaliki, Ohaukwu, Ebonyi, Afikpo North, Afikpo South, Ishielu, Ezza South, Ezza North, Izzi, Ikwo, Ivo, Ohaozara and Onicha. The indigenes are mainly farmers with few traders and civil servants (Ebonyi State House of Assembly 2022). The state has 226 public secondary schools in the three education zones (Ebonyi State Secondary School Board, 2022). The secondary school teachers are faced with enormous responsibilities such as helping students to acquire knowledge, competence and virtue, day-to-day running of the schools as well as the enhancement and promotion of quality education, among other responsibilities. Erroneously, the type of political system run in Nigeria in general and Ebonyi state in particular, does not afford teachers any joy on their job thereby exposing them to an enormous stress.

The population for this study comprised of all the male and female public secondary school teachers. Available information from Ebonyi State Secondary Education Board (2022) showed that the population of secondary school teachers in the state was 4,360. The sample for this study consisted of 436 teachers. This represented 10% of male and female population for the study. This is in line with Nwana (2014) who suggested that if the population of a study is in few thousands, 10% of the number could be used. The multistage sampling procedure was used in selecting the sample. In the first stage, the researchers identified all the public secondary schools in Ebonyi state. The second stage involved a purposive clustering of the schools into the already three education zones in the state. The third stage involved stratifying the teachers into male and female strata from which 10% of each gender was selected using systematic random sampling technique. These procedures yielded a total sample of 436 (220 males & 216 female) teachers.

The instrument for data collection was a self-developed questionnaire titled: Sources of Stress Questionnaire (SSQ). The instrument consisted of 36 items meant to elicit information on the degree to which the respondents possessed the attributes of the variables under study. The questionnaire contains two sections, A and B. Section A contains one item on gender of respondents. Section B contain 35 items meant to elicit information on the sources of stress in which items 1-11 elicited information on administrative sources of stress, 12-16 on workload related sources, 17-21 on interpersonal sources, 22-27 on environmental sources and 28-35 on economy related sources. The respondents were required to indicate on a 4-point scale the option that serves as sources of stress, namely: Always (AL) = 4, sometimes (ST) = 3, rarely (RE) = 2 and never (NE) = 1. The instrument was validated by five experts in Health Education and Psychology. They were requested to certify the clarity of instructions to the respondents, proper wording of items in addressing the purpose of the study. The corrections and suggestions made by the experts were incorporated in the final draft of the instrument used for this study.

In order to determine the reliability of the SSQ, it was administered on 30 secondary school teachers in Abia state. The internal consistency of the instrument was computed using Cronbach alpha procedure. The internal consistency of the SSQ was 0.81, which was considered high enough to adjudge the SSQ reliable for use in the study. This is because, according to Ogbazi and Okpala (2014), if the correlation coefficient obtained on an instrument is up to 0.60 and above, the instrument should be considered good enough to be

used in the study.

Three research assistants were used in the distribution and collection of the SSQ. The researchers instructed the research assistants on the procedure for administration of the SSQ. Four hundred and thirty six copies of the questionnaire were administered on the respondents in their respective secondary schools. The respondents were requested to complete the questionnaire and return same to the research assistants immediately. The completed copies of the SSQ were examined for completeness of responses to the items. Data collected from the instrument were computed using mean and standard deviation. Mean score was used to describe the levels of sources of stress among the secondary school teachers. The relative mean for each item of the questionnaire was computed. A criterion mean of 2.50 was set for the study. The criterion mean was derived by adding up the scale values and dividing the sum by the number of scale options thus: $4+3+2+1=10$, then $10 \div 4 = 2.50$. Thereafter, Olaitan (1983) criterion adopted from Likert's scaling was applied to categorize the different constructs being studied for the purpose of description. A criterion mean of 2.50 and above was adjudged high level of stress, while mean below 2.50 was considered low level of stress. Standard deviation was used to check how the means clustered around the central mean. Independent samples t-test was used to test the hypothesis at an alpha level of 0.05.

3. Results

Table 1: Perceived Sources of Stress among Public Secondary School Teachers in Ebonyi State

Sources of Stress	Mean	SD	Dec.
Administrative Sources of Stress	2.95	0.44	HL
Workload- Related Sources of Stress	2.95	0.61	HL
Interpersonal Relations	2.20	0.69	LL
Environmental Sources of Stress	3.37	0.72	HL
Economy-Related Sources of Stress	3.28	0.41	HL

HL – High Level, LL – Low Level

Table 1 presents the mean and standard deviation of the perceived sources of stress among the secondary school teachers. The data show that administrative sources are perceived as constituting a high (2.95 ± 0.44) level of stress. Workload sources also generate a high (2.95 ± 0.61) level of stress. Similarly, environmental-related factors (3.37 ± 0.72) and economy (3.28 ± 0.41) are sources of high level of stress. On the other hand, only interpersonal relations generate a low (2.20 ± 0.69) level of stress. The standard deviations imply that the responses cluster narrowly around the central mean.

Table 2: Perceived Source of Stress among Male and Female Public Secondary School Teachers

Variables	N	Mean	SD	Dec.
Administrative				
Male	253	2.97	0.45	HL
Female	152	2.92	0.43	HL
Workload				
Male	253	2.97	0.57	HL
Female	152	2.92	0.66	HL
Interpersonal Relations				
Male	253	2.08	0.72	LL
Female	152	2.38	0.63	LL
Environment				
Male	253	3.41	0.76	HL
Female	152	3.29	0.64	HL
Economy				
Male	253	3.41	0.37	HL
Female	152	3.07	0.38	HL
Perceived Sources of Stress				
Male	253	2.97	0.39	HL
Female	152	2.92	0.34	HL

Table 2 shows results of perceived sources of stress among male and female public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state. The results show that male teachers perceive administrative sources (2.97 ± 0.45), workload sources (2.97 ± 0.57), environmental sources (3.41 ± 0.76) and economic sources (3.41 ± 0.37) as

generating high levels of stress; but perceive interpersonal relations as constituting a low (2.08 ± 0.72) level of stress. Likewise, female teachers perceive administrative sources (2.92 ± 0.43), workload sources (2.92 ± 0.66), environmental sources (3.29 ± 0.64) and economic sources (3.07 ± 0.38) as contributing a high level of stress. On the other hand they perceive interpersonal relations as a source of low (2.08 ± 0.72) stress. Overall, males have a higher (2.97 ± 0.39) perception of the sources of stress than the females (2.92 ± 0.34) have. This could imply that both male and female secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state experience high levels of stress. The standard deviations imply that the responses cluster narrowly around the central mean.

Table 3: T-test Analysis of the Difference in the Perceived Source of Stress of Stress among Male and Female Public Secondary School Teachers

Variables	N	Mean	SD	t-value	p-value
Administrative					
Male	253	2.97	0.45	1.152	0.250
Female	152	2.92	0.43		
Workload					
Male	253	2.97	0.57	0.753	0.452
Female	152	2.92	0.66		
Interpersonal Relations					
Male	253	2.08	0.72	4.306	0.000*
Female	152	2.38	0.63		
Environment					
Male	253	3.41	0.76	1.648	0.100
Female	152	3.29	0.64		
Economy					
Male	253	3.41	0.37	8.964	0.000*
Female	152	3.07	0.38		
Overall					
Male	253	2.97	0.39	1.382	0.168
Female	152	2.92	0.34		

* $p < 0.05$ Significant

Table 3 shows the results of the independent samples t-test analysis of the difference in the level of sources of stress between male and female secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state. The results show that there is no significant difference between the male and female teachers' perception on the levels of administrative sources of stress ($t = 1.152$, $p = 0.250$), workload sources of stress ($t = 0.753$, $p = 0.452$) and environmental sources of stress ($t = 1.648$, $p = 0.100$). But there is a significant difference between the male and female teachers' perception on levels of interpersonal relations sources of stress ($t = 4.306$, $p = 0.000$) and economic sources of stress ($t = 8.964$, $p = 0.000$). Generally, the hypothesis that there is no significant difference in the perceived levels of sources of stress between male and female secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state ($t = 1.382$, $p = 0.168$) is not rejected.

4. Discussion

This study reported that both male and female public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state experienced high levels of stress. On the basis of the differences in the levels of sources of stress, it was discovered that there was no significant difference in the levels of sources of stress between male and female public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state ($t = 1.382$, $p = 0.168$), with the mean score of males (2.97 ± 0.39) being slightly higher than that of females (2.92 ± 0.34). The finding showed quite similar levels of stress by male and female teachers possibly because the jobs of the males are not made by the school administrators to be different from those of females; rather both males and females are given similar jobs. Furthermore, the reason for the males perceiving more stress than females might be because of their role as the breadwinners of the family and the need to

maintain such role by taking upon themselves multiple workloads with the aim of increasing their pay. In comparison with other related studies, it was reported that male teachers experienced more stress than their female counterparts and male academics experienced more psychological and physical stress than their female counterparts (Borg & Riding 2013; Ademola & Mukhtan, 2018; Mondal, Serestha & Bhaila, 2011).

On the same vein, Liu and Zhu (2009) observed that men seem to be more stress prone since they are more likely to get into other things that add to stress such as alcoholism and smoking and reported that female academic staff members they studied experienced less stress than their male counterparts. The findings of the study seemed to corroborate those of previous studies which reported no significant differences in the stress levels of their male and female subjects (Abouserie, 2016; Faduyile & Orunbon, 2023; Ofoegbu & Nwadiani, 2006; Tumkaya, 2006) but went different direction from those that reported males experiencing higher levels of stress than their female colleagues (Van Zyl & Pietersen, 2009; Blix et al., 2004; Nwimo & Onwunaka, 2015). The differences in the findings of the earlier studies may have been accounted for by differences in location of the studies and the welfare packages by the administrators of the different school systems. Furthermore, in opposition to the findings of current study, it was reported that men and women responded differently to various levels of sources of stress and men reported greater stress in coping with administrative work. It was also indicated that male and female academics differed in perceived stress level in teaching and there were significant differences in their reaction to stress situations (Archibong, Bassey & Effiom, 2010; Davidson & Cooper, 2013). Despite the different views on the influence of gender on the level of stress, it remains clear that stress is a serious concern in education as supported by all the researchers that those working as secondary school teachers are experiencing increased stress levels.

5. Conclusion

Following the findings of this study, the study concluded that public secondary school teachers in Ebonyi state perceived a high level of stress emanating from administrative sources, workload-related sources, environmental-related sources, and economic-related sources, but a low level of stress generated by interpersonal relations-related sources. On the basis of the variable of interest, it was concluded that male and female public secondary school teachers experienced high levels of stress regardless of their characteristics. It was also concluded that there was no significant difference in the perceived levels of sources stress between the males and females; however, males experienced slightly higher levels of stress than females. Government can improve the working conditions of the teachers which might scale down the stress levels suffered by the teachers.

The findings of this research may not be used in making generalizations regarding other public school teachers in Nigeria and in another place; who may be different to a great degree in social and economic circumstances. The teachers studied may represent a significant cluster of the Nigerian public secondary school teachers; therefore, information generated will be useful in the stress reduction programs for public secondary schools in Nigeria and other sub-Saharan Africa countries that may have same cultural and social resemblance with Ebonyi state.

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