AGE AND SEX DISPARITIES IN THE LEVEL OF STRESS MANAGEMENT BEHAVIORS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN AKWA IBOM STATE

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ABSTRACT

The study was carried out to determine how secondary school principals vary in their stress management behaviours on the basis of some specified variables. Ex-post Facto research design was adopted for the study. This study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study is comprised of all public secondary school principals in Akwa Ibom State. There are 234 principals in Akwa Ibom State. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 out of 234 principals for the studies. This gave a total of 200 respondents used for the study. The instrument used in this study for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Principal's Variables and Stress Management Behaviors Questionnaire (PVSMBQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by two experts (one in test and measurement and one in educational administration and planning) to ensure that the instrument has the accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. For the content reliability test, Cronbach's alpha techniques were used. The survey data was organised and analyzed, with descriptive analysis used to answer the research questions and an independent t-test used to test the null hypotheses. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels. Based on the findings of the research work, conclusions were made that there is significant difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. Also that there is significant difference in stress management behaviour of male and female principals. One of the recommendations made was that the older principals should adopt the type of stress management behaviour of younger principals.

KEYWORDS: Age, Gender, Management Behaviours, Principals and Akwa Ibom State

Introduction

The word stress can be defined as the sum of physical and mental responses to an unacceptable disparity between real or imagined personal experiences and personal expectations. According to Treven and Potocan (2005), "stress" was derived from an Anglo-Saxon word and was first applied in physics to designate the mechanical force in the medical industry. Stress can occur at any age and in a variety of contexts, including the workplace, family obligations, and social activities. It is a response that includes both physical and mental components. Mental responses to stress include adaptive stress, anxiety, and depression. Stress that enhances physical and mental functions is considered good stress. It is needed to promote well-being by serving as a catalyst of stimulants to push an individual towards achieving the target goal. If stress persists to an excessive degree, it will eventually lead to the need for resolution. This condition may lead either to anxious/escape or depressive behaviour. It depletes an individual emotionally, mentally, and physically.

In recent years, we have seen a rise in stress across all spheres of life, particularly in the workplace. It is not surprising that we are seeing workplace stress emerge as a major cause of physical and mental problems. Stress is an individual's physical and mental reaction to environmental demands and pressures. Stress, in general, and occupational stress, in particular, is a fact of modern-day life that seems to have been on the increase. Occupational (job, work, and workplace) stress has become one of the most serious health issues in the modern world as it occurs in any job and is even more present than decades ago. Occupational stress, in particular, is the inability to cope with the pressures in a job (Rees, 2007) because of a poor fit between someone's abilities and his or her requirements and conditions.

Today's life is full of challenges. These days, stress is felt across all spheres of life, particularly at the workplace. Stress is the sum total of all non-specific biological phenomena elicited by adverse external influences. One feels stressed when one is confronted with unexpected results and situations. Stress may vary depending on how an individual perceives stressful events. Any challenge that exceeds the coping abilities of the individual becomes stressful. These days, stress is emerging as a major cause of physical and mental health problems. Stress is a common human phenomenon. It is a natural, ongoing, dynamic and interactive process that takes place as people adjust to their environment. Stress is a feeling of tension that is both physical and emotional and

is caused by physiological, psychological, and environmental demands. Thus, stress affects individuals physiologically, emotionally, and psychologically. Although some stress is a common and necessary element of life, excessive unmanaged stress has been linked to a long list of physical and mental health problems (Sapolsky, 2005; Weil, 2005; Wheeler, 2007; Colbert, 2008). As Colbert (2008) explains, not all stress is harmful and a certain amount of stress is a normal part of life. However, when an individual experiences high levels of ongoing stress, the excessive release of stress hormones can cause damage to cells, organs, and tissues (Wheeler, 2007 & Colbert, 2008). Occupational stress has become one of the most serious health issues in the modern world, as it occurs in any job and is even more present than decades ago. Occupational stress describes physical, mental, and emotional wear and tear brought about by discordance between the requirements of the job and the capabilities, resources, and needs of the employee to cope with job demands (Akinboye, 2002).

Statement of the Problem

Over the years, age and sex disparities and management behaviours of principals have been a response to both physical and mental components. Stress affects individuals physiologically, emotionally, and psychologically. Although some stress is a common and necessary element of life, excessive unmanaged stress has been linked to a long list of physical and mental health problems. Young and old alike have to face difficult situations and overcome obstacles with appropriate stress management behaviours. While young adults struggle to establish a career, achieve financial security, or juggle work and family demands, older people may face failing health, dwindling finances, or simply the challenges of retaining their independence by adopting methods that can relieve them of such stress. However, stress is a natural way of coping with changes in our environment.

Objectives of Study

The study was carried out to determine how secondary school principals vary in their stress management behaviors on the basis of some specified variables. Specifically, the study has the following objectives.

1. To determine the differences in stress management behaviors of principals based on their age.

2. To determine the differences in stress management behaviors of principals according to their gender.

Research Questions

The following research questions will be answered:

1. What differences exists in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals?
2. How do male and female principals differ in their stress management behaviours.

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses will be tested:

1. There is no significant difference between age and stress management behaviours among secondary school principals.
2. There is no significant difference in stress management behavior of male and female principals.

Conceptual Review

Concept of Stress

Stress is a psychological-physiological state or process that occurs when an individual faces events he/she perceives as threatening to his/her physical wellbeing. It grows out of the interaction that an individual has with the environment, occurring when there is a mismatch between situational demands (stressors) and the resources. Schwanke (2008) noted that stress is a natural way of coping with changes in our environment. Stress can also be referred to as any adjective demand that creates a state of tension or threat and that requires change or adaptation. Hines and Paulson (2006) observed stress as a condition where job-related factors interact with the workers to change their psychological condition from normal functioning. Darmordy and Smyth (2010) conceptualised that stress is positive if it enables a person to perform or excel in a given situation or event, and it is negative if there is an excessive amount of stress that causes the individual to reduce performance. There is a relationship between perceived work stress and academic performance. This could be due to self-efficacy beliefs, workload, frustrations, pressure, and fear of failure. There is rarely a person that does not

experience stress based primarily upon their perceptions of the situation, values, and goals; students, being in contact with different environments, are exposed to various forces and events. These forces and events put demands and pressures on time and attention, which result in frustrations, tensions, and anxieties because of the difficulty of attending and responding to these forces and events. The lack of understanding of the effects of these psychological processes in human life and possible adaptation leads to stress. Therefore, stress may be referred to as a complex physiological process which is initiated by situations or circumstances.

Okeke (2013) explained stress as a negative and unpleasant condition that may be experienced when a person is unable to meet the demands and pressures that are placed upon him. He further added that a certain amount of stress is good because it enables the body to release adrenaline in response to stress, which will give the needed stimulation to deal with difficult situations when problems arise. Stopper (2006) also explained stress as any physical, chemical, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension. Stopper observed that a mild degree of stress and tension can sometimes be beneficial. Feeling mildly stressed when carrying out an academic project or assignment often compels individuals to perform academically well. However, stress becomes a problem when pressures placed on an individual are perceived to be excessive or intolerable, overwhelming or poorly managed. This level of stress always leads to academic failure.

Age and Stress Management Behaviour

Stress is a complex phenomenon; it depends largely on background experiences, temperament, and environmental conditions. Chris (2004) said that at any age, stress is a part of life. Young and old alike have to face difficult situations and overcome obstacles with appropriate stress management behaviours. While young adults struggle to establish a career, achieve financial security, or juggle work and family demands, older people may face failing health, dwindling finances, or simply the challenges of retaining their independence by adopting methods that can relieve them of such stress. Unfortunately, the body's natural defences against stress gradually break down with age. Durani (2009) asserts that you don't have to give in to stress just because you're no longer young. Many seniors still manage to sail through their later years. "Successful agers" tend to have a few things in common to help manage stress: They stay connected to friends and family, they exercise and keep active, and, above all, they find ways to

both reduce and manage the stress in their lives by taking lots of naps and taking stress-relieving supplements. A certain level of stress is unavoidable. Because of its complex nature, stress has been studied for many years by researchers in psychology, sociology, and medicine.

A comparative study was conducted by Kyriacou (2001) on teacher stress management behaviours with respect to their age. The study adopted a sample size of 220 teachers made up of 120 younger and 100 older teachers drawn using a stratified randomly sampling technique out of 23 public schools in Tanzania and found that 62% of the younger teachers were identified with good stress management behaviour while 76% of the older teachers were identified with good stress management behaviour. Teacher stress is defined as the experience by a teacher of negative, unpleasant emotions (such as tension, anger, or depression) as a result of some aspect of their work (Kyriacou, 2001). It's not uncommon, and it appears to be universal across cultures. Harney (2008) posited that principals should be particularly concerned about the effect of teacher stress on the academic outcomes of their students. As most principals would expect, the effects of stress on individual teachers affect the classroom environment and learning (Antoniou and Vlachakis, 2006). Stress among teachers is related to absenteeism, turnover, and early retirement, which negatively affect the climate of the school and lead to poor student outcomes, both academically and behaviorally. Most teachers tend to use alcoholic beverages to calm their stress or take some of their workload home to manage their stress. Mearns and Cain (2003) observed that stress management intervention programmes have a variety of outcomes, such as improved peer support, reduced levels of somatic complaints, decreased work pressure and role ambiguity, enhanced feelings of personal accomplishment, and improved job satisfaction. Ferrandino (2001) asserts that a principal who addresses the needs of the teachers promotes an environment in which teachers can more readily address the needs of the students. When people are faced with demands from others or demands from the physical or psycho-social environment to which they feel unable to adequately respond, a reaction in the organism is activated to cope with the situation. The nature of this response depends upon a combination of different elements, including the extent of the demand, the personal characteristics and coping resources of the person, the constraints on the person in trying to cope, and the support received from others. As part of their stress management technique, most teachers tend to use music to calm their stress while some act calmly in pressured situations, especially the older ones.

Gender and Stress Management Behaviour

Carol (2011) remarked that female principals are more stressed than their male counterparts because of the combination of domestic work with official roles. Hence, the study of the variable of gender and its relationship with stress is necessary. Some female principals normally go into the class rooms and chat with the students to ease their stress (International Journal of Learning, 2004). Nobile (2007) noted that female teachers experience more stress than males in the area of time management and even reported high scores of physical symptoms of stress in teacher/ teacher relations. As a stress management technique, male principals, when stressed, call their wives and loved ones to communicate. Most of the principals go out for a break, and some teachers are asked to relieve themselves when they are tired by taking a lunch break. McCormick and Punch (2005) said job satisfaction and teacher stress are strongly correlated. They also noted that the amount of stress and degree of job satisfaction experienced by teachers directly influence the quality of teacher work life.

Ani (2011) opined that both male and female principals undergo stress in their jobs. Certain roles are stereotyped for males and females, but it appears that principals may perceive stress and the management of stress differently. Hittner (2001) suggested a list of events related to teachers' life satisfaction that could affect their stress and performance at work. These events include marriage, divorce, pregnancy of the loved one, and change of residence. Thus, female principals sometimes indulge in reading story books or taking naps to relieve their stress. Social networks also help the principals in the management of their stress, as both genders enjoy chatting and communication. When feeling bored, most teachers log on to any social network and chat with friends, and also check to see what is happening around them.

Singh and Billingsley (2006) assert that excessive paper work and lack of administrative support were consistently cited as major sources of stress, dissatisfaction, and attrition, while positive working environments were often indicative of satisfied teachers. Charlie (2001) notes that there are gender-based differences in teachers' stress. Ahlberg et al. (2003) also allude to the fact that females are more exposed to stress than their male counterparts. According to Abosede (2004), female workers are more stressed because they attempt to strike a balance between professional and home responsibilities. There is often isolation from colleagues, dissatisfaction with parent participation, frustration with paper work, and a dearth of principal support. In general, teachers who rank their

work environment and principal relationships positively are more likely to be committed and satisfied with teaching and less likely to suffer from symptoms of stress. Bertoch et al. (2003) said most female principals find a way to ease their stress by talking to friends. Also, female principals enjoy chewing gum to manage their stress level.

Panenbianco (2003) conducted a study on stress among school administrators in Kenya and reported that more men, compared with women, make use of stress-management self-instructional DVDs after long hours of busy days to reduce obsessive-compulsive stress symptoms dramatically. The finding of this study is most surprising because the techno-phobic traits mostly attributed to females would have negatively influenced their use of IET to suppress their level of stress. The experience and consequences of stress are mediated and moderated by several psychological and situational factors. Examining internal characteristics can provide teachers with insight into the levels of occupational stress that they endure. When the male teachers are stressed out, they may decide to take a walk around the school environment or engage in sporting activities. According to the professional literature, it is the levels of stress experienced that are harmful, not the stress itself. Bertoch et al. (2003) said that teachers, irrespective of gender, had their stress level reduced after being exposed to audio-visual packages. Similarly, Spector (2000) was of the opinion that engaging in relaxation activities is one of the ways to cope with stress. Cooper (2001), examined the sources and outcomes of job-related stress, the methods used to assess levels and consequences of occupational stress, along with behaviours that might be used by individuals and organisations to confront stress and its associated problems. Women experience more stress than men, report more physical symptoms of stress and are more likely to think they manage their stress poorly.

Methodology

Ex-post Facto research design was adopted for the study. This study was carried out in Akwa Ibom State. The population of this study is comprised of all public secondary school principals in Akwa Ibom State. There are 234 principals in Akwa Ibom State. A simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 200 out of 234 principals for the studies. This gave a total of 200 respondents used for the study. The instrument used in this study for data collection was a questionnaire titled "Principal's Variables and Stress Management Behaviors Questionnaire (PVSMBQ)". Face and content validation of the instrument was carried out by two experts (one in test and measurement and one in educational administration and planning) to ensure that the instrument has the

accuracy, appropriateness, and completeness for the study under consideration. For the content reliability test, Cronbach's alpha techniques were used. The survey data was organised and analyzed, with descriptive analysis used to answer the research questions and an independent t-test used to test the null hypotheses. The test for significance was done at 0.05 alpha levels.

Result/Data Analysis

Research Question One: The research question sought to find out the difference that exists in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. To answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data (see table 1)

Table 1: Descriptive analysis of the difference that exists in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals

Groups	N	X	Mean Diff.	Remarks
Older	76	73.51**		
			17.73	Remarkable Difference
Younger	124	55.78*		

**** The highest mean score**
*** The least mean score**
Source: Field Survey

The result of the above table 1 presents the descriptive analysis of the difference that exists in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. From the result of the analysis it was observed that the level of older principals (73.51) was remarkably higher than that of the younger principals (55.78) with remarkable mean difference of (17.73*). The result therefore means that there is remarkable difference existing in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals.

Research Question Two: The research question sought to find out the how male and female principals differ in their stress management behaviours. To answer the research question, descriptive analysis was performed on the data (see table 2).

Table 2: Descriptive analysis of the how male and female principals differ in their stress management behaviours

Groups	N	X	Mean Diff.	Remarks
Male	92	71.05**		
			15.80	Remarkable Difference
Female	108	55.25*		

**** The highest mean score**
*** The least mean score**
Source: Field Survey

The result of the above table 2 presents the descriptive analysis of how do male and female principals differ in their stress management behaviours. From the result of the analysis it was observed that the level of male principals (71.05) was remarkably higher than that of the female principals (55.25) with remarkable mean difference of (15.80*). The result therefore means that there is a remarkable difference in stress management behaviours among male and female principals.

Testing of Hypotheses

Hypothesis One: The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. In order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:-

1. Younger and older principals as the independent variables
2. Stress management behaviours as the dependent variables

Independent t-test analysis was used in comparing the two independent variables (See table 3).

Table 3: Independent t-test Analysis of the difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals.

Groups	N	X	SD	t
Younger principals	76	73.51	6.08	
				15.56*
Older principals	124	55.78	8.71	

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =198; N =200; Critical t value = 1.960**

The above table 3 presents the obtained t –value as (15.56*). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.960) at 0.05 levels with 198 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (15.56*) was greater than the critical t-value (1.960). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals.

Hypothesis Two: The null hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in stress management behavior of male and female principals. In order to test the hypothesis, two variables were identified as follows:-

1. Male and female principals as the independent variables
2. Stress management behaviours as the dependent variables

Independent t-test analysis was used in comparing the two independent variables (See table 4).

Table 4: Independent t-test Analysis of the difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals.

Groups	N	X	SD	t
Male principals	92	71.05	7.49	
				13.01*
Female principals	108	55.78	9.38	

***Significant at 0.05 level; df =198; N =200; Critical t value = 1.960**

The above table 4 presents the obtained t –value as (13.01*). This value was tested for significance by comparing it with the critical t-value (1.960) at 0.05 levels with 198 degree of freedom. The obtained t-value (13.01*) was greater than the critical t-value (1.960). Hence, the result was significant. The result therefore means that there is significant difference in stress management behavior of male and female principals.

Discussion of Findings

The result of the data analysis in table 3 was significant due to the fact that the obtained t-value (15.56) was greater than the critical t-value (1.960) at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. The result was in agreement with the research finding of Selye (1976), who opined that stress is caused by physiological, psychological and environmental demands. He also said that when

confronted with stressors, the body creates extra energy and stress occurs because our bodies do not use up all of the extra energy that has been created. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

The result of the data analysis in table 4 was significant due to the fact that the obtained t-value (13.01) was greater than the critical t-value (1.960) at 0.05 level with 198 degree of freedom. The result implies that there is significant difference in stress management behavior of male and female principals. The result was in agreement with the research finding of Murphy (1986), who found female teachers experiencing more stress than males in the area of time management and even reported high scores of physical symptoms of stress in teacher/ teacher relations. He also said that when the male principals are stressed up they call their wifes and loved ones to communicate. The significance of the result caused the null hypotheses to be rejected while the alternative one was accepted.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of the research work, the following conclusions are deemed necessary that there is significant difference in stress management behaviours of younger and older principals. Also, that there is significant difference in stress management behavior of male and female principals.

Recommendations

1. It is highly recommended that the older principals should adopt the type of stress management behaviour of younger principals.
2. Female principals should be as competent as male principals in handling stress

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