

Occupational Stress and Burnout among Secondary School Teachers in Sokoto Metropolis – Nigeria: How Does Coping Strategies Matter?



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ABSTRACT: This study investigated occupational stress and burnout among senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis and their coping strategies. The population of the study consisted of all public senior secondary school Teachers in Sokoto metropolis, totaling (1, 216). One hundred and ninety-six (196) respondents were selected based on Krejcie and Morgan table of determining sampling size from eight (8) secondary schools. Descriptive design was used for the study. Three adopted instruments titled; Teacher Stress Scale by Liman (2016) to measure teachers' stress, Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey (MBI-ES) by Maslach, Jackson and Schwab (1986) to measure teachers' burnout, the Cope Inventory by Carver, Sheier and Weintraub (1989) to measure teachers' coping strategies, were used to collect data for this research. Three hypotheses were tested and t-test was used for data analysis. The findings of the study shows that there is significance difference in occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis but, there is no significant difference in burnout and coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis. Conclusively, the findings of this research study shows that male teachers experience more stress than female teachers. The stress experienced by secondary school teachers can lead to reduced productivity and burnout. Nonetheless, stress coping strategies should be inaugurated to assist teachers reduced their stress. Some recommendations made include there is need to help teachers resolve occupational stress. This can be achieved through seminars, workshops, and sensitization programs.

KEYWORDS: Stress, Burnout, Coping Strategies, Teachers, School.

INTRODUCTION

Teaching within the educational context of school places teacher with diverse personalities and varying degrees of professional skills and training into situations that require frequent interaction and co-operation. Stress is a general term used to describe pressure that people experienced or are exposed to in life. It's the abnormal reaction that the organism displays against threatening environmental elements. Stress has been defined as an unpleasant emotional state fraught with tension, frustration, anxiety and emotional exhaustion (Kyriacou, 2001)

Occupational stress is a term used to define ongoing stress that is related to the workplace. The stress may have to do with the responsibilities associated with the work itself, or be caused by conditions that are based in the corporate culture or personality conflicts. Occupational stress has been defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of the job do not match the resources, capabilities and needs of the worker (Alves, 2005). Occupational stress occurs when there is a discrepancy between the demands of the environment/workplace and an individual's ability to carry out and complete these demand.

Teaching has been considered as one of the most stressful occupations. Teachers stress result from interactive processes which occurs between teachers and their teaching environment which leads to excessive demands being placed on them and resulting in physiological and psychological distress. The National Union of Teachers (NUT) reported that stress is one of the biggest problems facing teaching profession (NUT, 2012). Teacher stress is defined as the experience by a teacher of unpleasant negative emotions such as anger, frustration, anxiety, tension, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspects of their work as a teacher (Kyriacou 2001). Also Dollard, Winefield and Winefield (2003) defined teachers' occupational stress as "teachers' physiological, psychological and behavioural response resulting from the demanding aspects of their work as a teacher". Occupational stress occurs when a teacher subjectively experiences an incompatibility between himself/herself and his/her work environment, and feels unable to cope, adapt or function effectively as a result of which he or she endures poor mental or physical health or engages in dysfunctional and counterproductive behaviours.

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Furthermore, Tsagem, Abubakar and Musa (2014) observed that despite the recognition of some of the bureaucratic aspects of teacher stress, and measures to address it, teachers have to cope with a challenging and potentially stressful job day-to-day in a society that often portrays teaching in a less than favourable light. Some sources of stress for teachers are not directly related to the work involved in teaching and are beyond the control of the individual teacher, for example job security, resources and political issues in education.

Various factors have been identified as the causes of teachers' occupational stress. However, the sources of stress experienced by a particular teacher are unique to him/her and depend on the interaction between personality, values, skills and circumstances.

Alexander, Aikante and Marina (2013) categorise the causes of teacher stress in to two; those that arise from the environment and those that arise from the individual.

- 1- Environmental factors include:- unfavourable working conditions, heavy workloads, organizational problems, paucity of resources, lack of support and autonomy, role ambiguity, administrative pressures and lack of recognition.
- 2- Individual characteristics include the unique attributes of teachers such as:- personality, age, gender, feeling of insufficiency, demographic background, ability to establish and maintain supportive networks.

Also Jeffrey (2011) categorizes factors that causes teachers' stress into First and Second order stressors.

1. First order stressors directly interfere with teacher effort and can include: Student apathy, student disruption or discipline, poor student attendance, high student to teacher ratios, too much paperwork, prep work, irresponsible colleagues, obtrusive supervisors, lack of effective leadership, and seemingly non-supportive parents.
2. Second order stressors do not interfere directly with teacher effort and can include issues such as: Low salary, emotional fatigue, frustration, helplessness, stagnation, boredom, and loss of motivation or enthusiasm. And all these stressors lead to burnout

Burnout is a serious psychological condition that affects the lives of thousands of highly effective teachers. Burnout is defined as a state of physical, emotional and mental exhaustion, ineffectiveness and lack of accomplishment, as well as feeling of cynicism and detachment from one's occupation (Rolloff & Brown, 2011). A teacher who is experiencing burnout has low morale, low self-esteem, and is physically exhausted. Teachers' morale directly correlates with student achievement; the higher the teacher morale, the greater the student's achievement (Raines, 2011). Teacher's burnout is one of the most common reasons that effective teachers leave the profession. If a teacher is clinically depressed, anxious, or experiencing physical illness, he will be more likely to retire early or to cease working to his capacity than if he is emotionally and physically well.

Maslach and Jackson (1981) describe burnout as a syndrome of emotional exhaustion, depersonalization and lack of personal accomplishment. Maslach characterised "emotional exhaustion" as feelings of being emotionally overextended and depleted of one's emotional resources. Major source of this exhaustion are work overload and personal conflict at work. Depersonalization refers to a negative, cynical or excessively detached response to other people, which often includes loss of idealism. It usually develops in response to the overload of emotional exhaustion. Lack of personal accomplishment refers to a decline in feelings of competence and productivity at work. This lowered sense of self-efficacy has been linked to depression and an inability to cope with the demands of the job, and it can be exacerbated by lack of social support and of opportunity to develop professionally (Anna, 2001).

Also, Cooper, Dewe and Driscoll (2001) defined burnout as a state of psychological strain and depletion of energy resources arising from prolonged exposure to stressors which exceed an individuals resources to cope, particularly stressors associated with human resource profession.

Researchers have identified several factors that can cause teacher burnout; organizational structure of schools, lack of support, classroom management/discipline problems, lack of resources, role ambiguity, and personality traits (Yong & Yue, 2007; Gevin, 2007; Langan-Fox & Cooper, 2011; Wood & McCarthy, 2002; & Maslach, 1982):

Coping may be an important resource to teachers in dealing with the multiple demands of their profession. Teachers with more access to coping resources reported less stress and burnout than those with less access to coping resources (Betoret, 2006). It's suggested that learning effective coping strategies may contribute to a mastery orientation towards teaching, which significantly predicts enjoyment of work, participation, and positive career aspirations (Parker & Martin, 2009). Coping is viewed as one of the most important aspects of interventions designed to buffer the negative effects associated with stress caused by the many demands teachers face daily (Cooper, Dewe, & Driscoll, 2001).

Coping is defined as constantly changing cognitive and behavioural efforts to manage specific external and/or internal demands that are appraised as taxing or exceeding the resources of the person (Lazarus, 1993). Coping is typically viewed as a process because it involves change over time or across situations (Lazarus, 1993). Research has shown that with appropriate treatment and care, a teacher who is experiencing occupational stress and burnout can be helped to cope and revitalized and refocused on his work (Bousquet, 2012).

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STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupation (Cannon, 2013). Teaching at the secondary school level is an inherently stressful occupation with heavy workloads, poor working condition, low salaries, students' management, role conflict and conflicting demands. Stress in teaching is rooted in organisational causes related to the environment in which some teachers conduct their work. It is a common fact that schools are over populated by students which make the classes over crowded, many class containing more than hundred students. This raised a question of class control and effective delivery of teaching by teachers. The environment in which education is taking place is also deplorable to the extent that it is a common issue to find students taking classes under sheds or classes without doors, windows, chairs, tables and roofing. There is also acute shortage of teaching materials, equipments as well as personnel in the schools. Teaching materials and equipments are necessary for effective teaching and learning to take place. These and many other things summed up the stressful situation in which teachers are working in the Nigerian society of which Sokoto is included.

Also, teachers are expected to fill many roles in their daily tasks; these roles may include assessing, planning, curriculum development, providing information, role model, facilitator, and resource developer. As a result of balancing these roles, teachers become stressful. In view of the problems stated and many more were behind the rationale for conducting this study on occupational stress, burnout and coping strategies among senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis.

Research Questions

In order to carry out the study, the following research questions were developed to guide the conduct of the study.

1. Is there any difference in the occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers?
2. Is there any difference in the burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers?
3. Is there any difference in the coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers?

Research Objectives

The objectives set of this study were to find out:

1. If there is difference in the occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers.
2. If there is difference in the burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers.
3. If there is difference in the coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers.

Research Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested.

- H₀₁ There is no significant difference in the occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers.
H₀₂ There is no significant difference in the burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers.
H₀₃ There is no significant difference in the coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers.

Review of Empirical Studies

Nwimo and Onwunaka (2015) study adopted the cross-sectional survey design using a sample of 660 teachers randomly drawn from 33 secondary schools in Ebonyi State. The results showed that the secondary school teachers had a high level of stress. Also the study indicates that Interventions, such as stress management, can be carried out to reduce stress in the worksite.

Alexander, Aikaterini and Marina (2013) investigates the levels of occupational stress and professional burnout of teachers of primary and secondary education. It also aims to investigate the coping strategies that they adopt, and the relationship between them. The survey involved 388 teachers who teach in public schools in Attica. Findings showed that teachers of Primary Education experience higher levels of stress compared to the teachers of Secondary Education. The study also identified rational coping behaviours are a resource which help teachers overcome work-related stressors and burnout and achieve their valued outcomes with students, while avoidance coping predicted high level of stress and burnout.

Mctiernan and Mcdonald (2015) studied sixty-nine participants (8 males and 61 females), aged between 18 to 60 years who voluntarily completed the Mental Health Professional Stress Scale, the Maslach Burnout Inventory and the PsychNurse Methods of Coping Scale. The findings revealed that community nurses were operating in a moderately stressful environment. Stressors focused on organizational issues as opposed to client issues. The main stressors identified were lack of resources, workload and organizational structures/processes. Also the study reported that community nurses experienced average levels of emotional exhaustion, low levels of depersonalization and average levels of personal accomplishment. Avoidant coping strategies were favoured by the participants.

METHODOLOGY

This study adopted the descriptive research design. The population of the study comprised all public senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis. The total number/population of senior secondary school teachers was 1,216 from 29 public senior secondary schools in Sokoto metropolis. The sample of this study were selected from eight public senior secondary schools. Subjects

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for this research were chosen by simple random sampling technique. One hundred and two (102) male teachers and ninety-four (94) female teachers were used, thus one hundred and ninety six (196) subjects were selected from the population by proportionate sampling method.

To achieve the purpose of this study, three instruments were adopted to obtain relevant information from the respondents. The instruments are: adopted version of Teachers Stress Scale (TSS) by Liman (2016) to measure teachers' occupational stress, adopted version of Maslach Burnout Inventory-Educator Survey (MBI-ES) by Maslach, Jackson and Schwab (1986) to measure teachers' burnout and adopted version of The Cope Inventory by Carver, Sheier and Weintraub (1989) to measure teachers' coping strategies.

The data obtained from this study was subjected to descriptive statistics to determine the mean score, standard deviation, frequencies and percentage. In order to answer the research questions and to test the hypotheses, t-test was employed because it test the difference between two groups.

Result Presentation and Analysis

Independent sample t-test was employed in the analysis of occupational stress, burnout and coping strategies among senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis. A total of 196 questionnaires were distributed to the respondents and all were retrieved. All tables contained herein were derived from field work.

Testing of Research Hypotheses

Research Hypothesis One: *There is no significant difference in the occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis.*

Table 1. Difference in the male and female teachers' stress

Gender	N	Mean	Std. Deviation	t-Cal	p-value	Decision
Male	102	89.01	15.87	2.81	0.001	H ₀ Rejected
Female	94	75.61	12.51			

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Table 1 shows result indicating that scores were significantly higher for the male ($M = 89.01$, $SD = 15.87$) than for the female ($M = 75.61$, $SD = 12.51$), $t(195) = 2.81$, $p < .001$. The result revealed that there was a significant difference in occupational stress between male and female senior secondary school teachers. On the basis of this finding, the research hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis was therefore rejected.

Research Hypothesis Two: *There is no significant difference in burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis*

Table 2. Burnout between Male and Female Teachers (Item by item)

Item	Male		Female		t-test statistics	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	t-Cal	p-value
Emotional Exhaustion	34.62	3.38	34.22	3.25	1.03	0.54
Depersonalization	14.03	1.62	16.78	1.78	1.98	0.03
Personal accomplishment	32.36	3.15	30.90	3.08	1.56	0.06

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Result presented in table 2 though shows that there was no significant difference between the male and female teachers in their emotional exhaustion ($t = 1.03$; $p\text{-value} = 0.54 > 0.05$), it also indicated that there was significant difference between the male and female teachers in their depersonalization ($t = 1.98$; $p\text{-value} = 0.03 < 0.05$) and personal accomplishment ($t = 1.59$; $p\text{-value} = 0.06 < 0.05$). The result revealed that there was no significant difference in the burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers. Therefore, the research hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in burnout of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis was retained.

Research Hypothesis Three: *There is no significant difference in coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis*

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Table 3. Coping Strategies between Male and Female Teachers (item by item)

Item	Male		Female		t-test statistics	
	Mean	Std. Dev	Mean	Std. Dev	T	p-value
Positive coping	14.0	1.60	14.40	1.63	1.07	0.51
Active coping	10.83	1.75	14.60	1.74	1.94	0.03
Religion	15.33	1.96	14.0	1.84	1.98	0.07
Suppression of competing activities	13.67	1.76	13.80	1.74	0.41	0.81
Planning	14.69	2.05	14.70	2.05	0.26	0.75

Source: Fieldwork 2022

Result presented in table 3 though indicated that there was significant difference in coping strategies between the male and female in active coping ($t = 1.94$, $p\text{-value} = 0.03 < 0.05$) and religion ($t = 1.98$, $p\text{-value} = 0.07 < 0.05$), the results further show that there was no significant difference in coping strategies between the male and female teachers in positive coping ($t = 1.07$, $p\text{-value} = 0.51 > 0.05$), suppression of competing activities ($t = 0.41$, $p\text{-value} = 0.81 > 0.05$), and planning ($t = 0.26$, $p\text{-value} = 0.75 > 0.05$). Therefore, the research hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between coping strategies of male and female senior secondary school teachers was retained.

DISCUSSION

The discussion will be based on the hypotheses raised. Research hypothesis one which states that there is no significant difference in occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers was rejected, because there was a significant difference between occupational stress of male and female senior secondary school teachers in Sokoto metropolis. This finding shows that male teachers experience more stress than their female counterparts. This is not surprising owing to the fact that male teachers are engaged in high workload compared to female teachers. In addition to this, high demand is always placed on male teachers than female teachers. Such demand and workload would precipitate much stress, coupled with domestic responsibility as head of the house. In adverse situations, this could result to anger, anxiety, depression and reduced health and wellbeing.

Although gender difference in stress has been examined by different researchers, however, a number of empirical evidence has been provided to prove that stress is gender related. For example, a number of authors have suggested that women find themselves in stressful circumstances more than men (Almeida & Kessler, 2008; McDonough & Walters, 2001) while other researchers suggested that it is possible that women appraise threatening events as more stressful than men do (Miller & Kirsch, 2007; Ptacek, Smith & Zanas, 2002). However, Mirowsky and Ross (2005) indicated that experience of stress by male and female individuals depends on the type of stress. He acknowledged that women experience chronic stress related to life events, while men experienced stress related to workplace. The later confirmed the finding of this study that male teachers are likely to experience workplace stress.

Research hypothesis two revealed that there was no significant difference in the burnout of male and female teachers. This finding suggested that although burnout may be experienced by many secondary school teachers, however, it is not gender related. This may be due to unfavorable working condition in most secondary schools which affects all gender groups. Contrary to this, an inspection of individual variables that make up burnout in this study suggested that women experience more depersonalization compared to men, with other empirical evidence indicating that women experience more exhaustion compared to men (Hakanen, 2002). In support of this study, Adekola (2010) found that no significant difference in the level of emotional exhaustion and depersonalization of staff of both sexes exist. On the contrary, Adekola (2006) confirmed that female staff experience higher level of reduced personal accomplishment than their male counterparts. These findings provide empirical justification that experience of burnout by male and female individuals depend on the type of burnout.

Research hypothesis three revealed that there was no significant difference in the coping strategies used by teachers between male and female, with female teachers having a likelihood of having more coping mechanism towards adjusting for stress and burnout. An inspection of individual coping strategy indicated that male teachers are more likely to use mental disengagement as a coping strategy than their female counterparts. However, female teachers are more likely to employ active coping, restraint coping, emotional social support, and acceptance strategy than their male counterparts. This implies that both sexes differ significantly in the ways they cope with stress, with empirical evidence suggesting that women have a wider range of relationship than men, and may use these networks to build up strength with which they cope with stress and burnout (Adekola, 2006; Kalimo, topinen, Koskinen & Vaananen, 1997). Additionally, Kalimo, topinen, Koskinen and Vaananen, (1997) discovered that both

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sexes differ significantly in the ways they cope with stress. According to them, women do take sick leave more often than men and were clearly more active in seeking outside help for their problems, while men thought more and more of retiring as their burnout gets worse. Although the magnitude of differences is quite small, several investigators have found that men made more frequent use of instrumental coping and women were more likely to use emotion-focused coping (Billings & Moos, 2014; Ptacek, Smith, & Dodge, 2004). Overall, women have a wider range of relationships than men and they also use these networks to build up their strength.

CONCLUSION

Conclusion drawn from this study indicated that there is significant difference in occupational stress between male and female senior secondary school teachers, no significant difference in burnout between male and female senior secondary school teachers and also no significant difference in coping strategies between male and female senior secondary school teachers. The findings of this research study shows that male teachers experience more stress than female teachers. The stress experienced by secondary school teachers can lead to reduced productivity and burnout. However, stress coping strategies should be inaugurated to assist teachers reduced their stress.

RECOMMENDATIONS

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

1. There is need to help teachers resolve occupational stress. This can be achieved through seminars, workshops, and sensitization programs.
2. Although no significant gender difference was observed on burnout, however, it does not mean that burnout does not exist among teachers. For this reason, there is urgent need to tackle teachers' stress before it leads to burnout.
3. Based on the fact that women employ strategies to cope with workplace stress and burnout compared to men, male teachers should be engaged in stress and burnout management programmes to cope with workplace and domestic activities. Such should be tailored to enable them overcome life challenges. Overall, increasing teachers' incentives for work overload can be used to overcome these workplace stressors.

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