

**PRINCIPALS' STRESS MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR
EFFECTIVE JOB PERFORMANCE IN SECONDARY SCHOOLS
IN UMUAHIA NORTH LOCAL GOVERNMENT
AREA OF ABIA STATE**

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Abstract

The study investigated principals' management strategies for effective Job performance in secondary schools in Umuahia North Local Government Area of Abia State. It focused on the nature, sources and effects of stressors on administrative roles and strategies employed in management of such stressors. Correlation survey design was used with the population of 20 principals and 20 vice principals of public secondary schools in the area. Structured questionnaire titled 'Principals' stress management strategies for effective job performance questionnaire was used for data collection comprising 17 item – statements. Mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question while the hypotheses were tested using simple regression model and Pearson moments correlation coefficient model. The findings revealed that the sources of management related job stress are work overload, inadequate funds among others. It also revealed major effects of management related job stress to include inability to supervise subordinates when they are under pressure of work, meet targets, take administrative decisions and attend to staff and student's needs. Based on the findings, recommendations were made to include that the ministry of education should periodically organize seminars and workshops for principals to identify the nature of job stress and its effect on life and duty performance; that the principals should consciously eliminate the various stressors to achieve high job performance among others.

Key words: Principals, stress management, job performance, Abia state

Introduction

Globally, Secondary school system is a formal organization which is managed by the principals through administration. Principal's administration plays very important role in realizing educational goals and objectives. It is important to note that, conducive working environment can be created by principal and be enjoyed by teachers, students and non-teaching staff through his or her styles of leadership, channel of communication, among others

(Harriet, 2016). The school environment un-conduciveness may cause stress to the principals (Alasomuka, 2019). Latha (2017) observed that stress is a dynamic conduction which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, demand, or resource related to what the individual desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important.

It can be seen as the inability of an individual to cope with his or her environment particularly the responses the body makes while striving to maintain equilibrium and deal with the demands of life (Mwangi, 2014). It can be observed as a situation in which environment or internal demands tax or exceed the adaptive responses of the individual.

According to Cole (2016), stress is the adverse psychological and physical reactions that occur in an individual as a result of their being unable to cope with the demands being made on them. It is an individual's adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging or threatening to the person's wellbeing. In the opinion of Barkey (2014), pressure comes on all individuals but the inability to deal with it, is what manifests as stress. Stress is therefore a reaction to a situation that can have a positive or negative effect. It is the individual's perception of the situation that determines whether the pressure is a challenge or a threat (Khan & Khan, 2015).

Within the education scene, stress has become a serious issue in recent years as school principals attempt to cope with frequent changes in school management processes (Denga & Ekpo, 2011). Stress in the teaching profession has also become a focus for teacher unions as they seek to support educators in their attempt to cope with work related stress which is also applicable to principals. (Alasomuka, 2019). According to the study of Gold and Roth (2013) which sought to determine stress and satisfaction levels of principals, causes of their stress and processed coping strategies in Australia, it was observed that stress comes as a result of physical and emotional reactions. It can either be positive or negative, depending on one's interpretations.

Stress can be positive (eustress) which is associated with achievement and exhilaration which stimulates an individual to better performance (Munyu, 2012). On the other hand, distress is the negative stress associated with loss of security, helplessness, disappointment and desperation which results in feelings of distrust, rejection, anger and depression (Mudhu, 2015).

Stress, however is typically discussed in a negative context, it also has a positive value (Waweru, 2011). It is an opportunity when it offers potential gain. Consider, for instance, the superior performance that an athlete or stage performer gives in "cluth" situations. Such individuals often use stress positively to rise to the occasion and perform at or near their maximum. Similarly, many professionals, including teaching professionals see the

pressures of heavy workloads and deadlines as positive challenges that enhance the quality of their work and the satisfaction they get from their job (Zizinga, 2012).

When a principal does not delegate some aspects of duties appropriately, he or she may encounter stress. Brown (2016) observed that up to one third of principals perceive their occupation as highly stressful. Latha (2017) remarked that female principals are more stressful than their male counterparts because of combination of domestic work with official roles. The symptoms of stress are manifested differently by different people. It could be that the symptoms are suppression of the reproductive system, anxiety, aggressiveness, indigestion, stomach ache, pains, dizziness and rapid heart breath, chronic stress creates muscle tension, fatigue, constipation and arthritis (Latha, 2017). Obisi (2005) sees both male and female principals as being stressful in their jobs. Principals have multiple roles to play in secondary schools among which include running and controlling the schools through establishing the school's educational objectives, interpreting and communicating educational policies, personnel management, management of physical facilities and equipment, supervision of school curriculum, evaluation and even actual classroom teaching (Uzoeshi, 2017). It is important to note that due to workload pressures, principals in turn express anger and frustration that adversely impacts on educational outcomes hence leading to work related stress.

Stress is associated with demand and resources. Demands are responsibilities, resources, obligations and even uncertainties that individuals face in the workplace. Resources are things within an individual's control that can be used to resolve the demands (Tharaka, 2014). Stress can be caused by environmental factors, organizational factors and personal factors. Environmental factors such as environmental uncertainty influences the design of an organization's structure and also influences stress levels among employees in that organization (Alasomuka, 2019). However, changes in the business cycle create economic uncertainties. When the economy is contracting, for example, people become increasingly anxious about their job security as it is related to political uncertainties, technological change and Terrorism. For instance, technological change is a type of environmental factor that can cause stress. This is because new innovations can make an employee's skills and experience absolute in a very short time, computers, robotics, automation and similar forms of technological innovation are a threat to many people and cause them stress, including principals (Garst, Frese & Molenaar, 2015).

Organizational factors that cause stress include pressures to avoid errors or complete tasks in a limited time, work overload, a demanding and insensitive boss, and unpleasant co-workers (Augia, 2011). These factors can be categorized under task, role and interpersonal demands. Task demands are factors related to a person's job which include the design of the individual's job (autonomy, task variety, degree of automation), working conditions and the physical work layout. 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. Role overload is experienced when the employee is expected to do more than time permits (Frew & Bruning, 2016). However, interpersonal demands are pressures created by other employees.

Lack of social support from colleagues and poor interpersonal relationship can cause stress, especially among employees with a high social need. These can be called personal factors. Personal factor of stress are the typical individuals work of about 40-50 hours a work. But the experiences and problems that people encounter in those other 120 plus non-work hours each week can spill over to the job. These encompassing factors in the employee's personal life include family issues, personal economic problems and inherent personality characteristics (Augia, 2011). All these stress encountered by employees have a lot of consequences.

Stress shows itself in a number of ways. For instance, an individual who is experiencing a high level of stress may develop high blood pressure, ulcers, irritability, difficulty in making routine decisions, loss of appetite, accident proneness, among others (Schuler, 2015). Behavioural related stress symptoms include changes in productivity, absence, and turnover, as well as changes in eating habits, increased smoking or consumption of alcohol rapid speech, fidgeting and sleep disorder (deGoon, Sluiter, Blonk, Broersen & Frings-Dresen, 2014). There has been a significant amount of research investigating the stress-performance relationship. The most widely studied pattern in the stress performance literature is the inverted 'U' relationship. The logic underlying the inverted 'U' is that low moderate levels of stress stimulate the body and increase its ability to react individually and then often perform their tasks better, more intensely or more rapidly (Sullivan & Bhagut, 2016). It is important to note that, too much stress places unattainable demands on a person which result in lower performance. And the principals need to put strategies that will help them to manage all these stress to enhance effective job performance in secondary schools.

It is important to note that, from the organization's standpoint, management may not be concerned when employees experience low to

moderate levels of stress. The reason is that, such levels of stress may be functional and lead to higher employee performance (Decroon *et al.*, 2014). Although high levels of stress, or even low levels sustained over long periods, can lead to reduced employee performance and thus, require action by management (Chaplain, 2010). However, a limited amount of stress may benefit an employee's performance, but management do not expect employees to see it that way. Thus, from the individual's standpoint, even low levels of stress are likely to be perceived as undesirable. It is not unlikely, therefore, for employees and management to have different notions of what constitutes an acceptable level of stress on the job (Morgan, 2013). There are two approaches to stress management: namely individual approach, and organizational approaches.

An employee can take personal responsibility for reducing stress levels. Individual strategies that have proven effective include implementing time-management techniques, increasing physical exercise relaxation training and expanding the social support network (Uzoeshi, 2014). Thus, many people manage their time poorly. The well-organized employee, like the well-organized students can often accomplish twice as much as the person who is poorly organized. Therefore an understanding and utilization of basic time-management principles can help individual better cope with tensions created by job demands (Mutai, 2013).

In the organizational approach, several of the factors that cause stress particularly task and role demands are controlled by management. As such, they can be modified or changed. Strategies that management might want to consider includes improved personnel selection and job placement, training, use of realistic goal setting, redesigning of jobs, increased employee involvement, improved organizational communication, offering employee sabbaticals, and establishment of corporate wellness programmes (Mutai, 2013). However, it is important to note that, individuals differ in their response to stressful situations. For instance, individuals with little experience or an external locus of control tend to be more prone to stress (Brown, 2016). Selection and placement decisions should take these facts into consideration. Obviously, management should not restrict hiring to only experienced individuals with an internal locus, but such individuals may adapt better to high stress jobs and perform those jobs more effectively. Similarly, training can increase an individual's self-efficacy and thus lessen job strain (Alasomuka, 2019). This has informed the researchers to examine Principals' management strategies for effective job performance in secondary schools in Umuahia North LGA of Abia State. This is because no work has been carried out in this area of study to the best knowledge of the researchers.

Abia State has experienced in the last one-decade great pressure for the expansion of access to quality secondary school education in the government owned schools due to the increasing financial burden placed on parents by the privately owned secondary schools which placed such financial burdens on the parents because of quality services rendered. This has in turn accelerated the need for more principals to head the government-owned secondary schools. To meet up with the need for demanded standard, some persons without any form of training for principalship jobs are promoted to become principals. These principals go into the field only to be confronted with the reality of the pressures involved in the job. Such pressures may include the running and controlling of schools through establishing the school's educational objectives, interpreting and communication educational policies, personnel management, management of physical facilities and equipment, supervision of school curriculum, evaluation and even actual classroom teaching.

In addition to dealing with pressure for excellent academic performance, they are equally faced with the abdication of parental responsibility, incompetent board of governors, culture of impunity in the society, adolescence identity crisis and mass media influence. All these among many other factors could pose threat to the emotional, psychological and physical demeanor of principals thereby causing a situation that translates into stress. The researcher is therefore concerned about what has to be done to minimize the influence of job-related stress on effective job performance and how to develop coping strategies for practicing administrators.

The study was guided by the following research questions and hypothesis

- What is the nature of job-related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State?
- What are the sources of job-related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State?
- What is the effect of job-related stress on administrative roles of secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State?
- What coping strategies do secondary schools principals employ in managing job-related stress in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State?
- Job related stress has no significant effect on administrative roles and effectiveness of secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State.
- There is no significant relationship between coping strategies to job-related stress employed and effectiveness of secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State.

Method

The research design used for this study was correlational research design considered appropriate and suitable for this study because it focused on obtaining information and analyzing data from a group of principals considered to be representative of the entire population about the principal stress management strategies for effective job performance in secondary schools. This research was carried out in Umuahia North LGA, in Abia State with 20 public secondary schools. The population of the study was 40 (20 principals and 20 vice principals (SEMB, Abia State, 2017). Census sampling was used because of the manageable size of the population. The instrument for data collection was researchers' structured questionnaire titled "Principals' stress management strategies for effective job performance.

Section 'A' elicited information only on demographic characteristics of respondents while Section 'B' gathered information on job-related stress issues among secondary school principals made up of 17 item-statements. The questionnaire was structured alongside four point rating scale of Strongly Agree (SA) 4, Agree (A) 3, Disagree (D) 2, and Strongly Disagree (SD) 1 with a mean bench mark of 2.50. The instrument was validated by three experts in the Departments of Educational Management and Science Education (Measurement and Evaluation), Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike. The instrument was subjected to face validation to ensure that the content scope of test items are relevant, appropriate and equally acceptance to respondents using table of specification. Split half method was used to get the reliability of the instrument and was established using Pearson product moment correlation coefficient and was found to be 0.82 using test re-test reliability method. The questionnaire was administered to the principals and vice principals and collected the same day which yielded 100% return. Data collected from the field were analyzed using frequency, percentages, means and standard deviation for research questions. The null hypotheses were tested using spearman correlation coefficient.

Results

Table 1. Mean responses on the nature of job-related stress among secondary school principals

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	SD	Decision
1	Physical tiredness	18	12	7	3	2.76	0.86	Agree
2	Emotional Strain	15	13	10	2	2.18	0.72	Agree
3	Mental Fatigue	13	17	4	6	2.06	0.68	Agree
	Grand Mean					2.33	0.75	Agree

Table 1 shows the mean responses on the nature of job related stress among secondary school Principals in Umuahia North LGA. It shows that the respondents strongly opined that physical tiredness is the highest job-related stress producer among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA of Abia State (M=2.76, SD=0.86). Thus physical tiredness is a factor that is implicated the highest as a possible cause of job related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA. This was followed by emotional strain (M=2.18, SD=0.72) and mental fatigue (M=2.06, SD=0.68).

This result implies that the nature of job related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA is caused more by physical tiredness than emotional strain and mental fatigue.

Table 2. Mean responses on the sources of job-related stress among secondary school principals

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Work overload	20	12	5	3	3.12	0.83	Agree
2	Staff inter-relationship	2	8	18	12	2.42	0.88	Disagree
3	Inadequate funds	10	19	6	5	2.44	0.92	Agree
4	Curriculum supervision	11	20	4	5	2.62	0.86	Agree
5	Facilities supervision	19	12	6	3	2.72	0.92	Agree
Grand Mean						2.66	0.88	Agree

The table 2 shows the mean responses on the sources of job related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA. It shows that the principals strongly agreed that work overload (M=3.12, SD=0.83) is a key source of job-related stress among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA. This was followed by facilities supervision (M=2.72, SD=0.92) curriculum supervision (m=2.62, SD=0.86), inadequate funds (M=2.44, SD=0.92) and staff inter-relationship (M=2.42, SD=0.88). The grand mean rating of 2.66 and SD=0.88 shows that these situations actually contributed to making principal-ship job stressful in secondary school in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State.

Table 3. Mean responses on the effect of job-related stress on administrative roles among Principals

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Inability to supervise	5	3	20	12	2.92	0.92	Disagree
2	Inability to meet targets	2	2	14	22	2.42	0.81	Disagree
3	Inability to take administrative decisions	10	6	18	6	2.47	0.96	Disagree
4	Inability to attend to staff and students' needs	11	8	17	4	2.36	0.88	Disagree
Grand Mean						2.54	0.89	Disagree

Table 3 shows the mean responses of the effect of job-related stress on administrative roles among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA. It indicates the level of effect of job-related stress on administrative roles among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA. The mean ratings of inability to supervise (M=2.92, SD=0.92), Inability to meet targets (M=2.42, SD = 0.81), Inability to take administrative decision (M=2.47, SD=0.96) and inability to attend to staff and student's needs (M=2.36, SD=0.88) and the grand mean rating of 2.54, SD=0.89)

Table 4 Effect of Job-related stress on administrative roles of secondary school principals.

Variables	Coefficient	Std. Error	T-value
Constant	0.128**	0.047	2.755
Job-related stress	0.766***	0.056	13.634
R ²	0.757		
F-value	307.621***		

The data in Table 4 shows that regression estimate of the effects of job-related stress on administrative roles and effectiveness of secondary school principals in Umuahia North L.G.A, Abia State. The result showing that the R² (Multiple determination) was 0.757. this implies that 75.7% variability of the administrative roles and the remaining 24.3% could be attributed to error and omitted variables. The F-value of 307.621 was significant at 1% level, which implies that the model is adequate for use in further analysis and it indicates a requirement best fit. The result indicates that the variable was positive and significant at 1%, which agree with a priority expectation. This means that the job-related stress occurs in Umuahia North L.G.A, Abia State has a positive and significant effect on the administrative roles and effectiveness of secondary school principals in the study area.

Table 5. Mean responses

S/N	Variables	SA	A	D	SD	Mean	Std Dev.	Decision
1	Delegating duties	20	14	2	4	3.12	0.92	Agree
2	Hiring technical experts	13	19	6	2	2.92	0.88	Agree
3	Attending seminars	21	13	5	1	2.82	0.84	Agree
4	Setting up committees	20	12	6	2	2.89	0.86	Agree
5	Focusing on individual tasks	18	16	3	3	2.79	0.80	Agree
Grand Mean						2.91	0.86	Agree

The result on Table 5 shows the mean responses on the coping strategies secondary school principals employ in Umuahia North, LGA. It shows that the participants strongly agreed that delegating duties (M=3.12, SD=0.92) was the highest coping strategy secondary school principals employ in Umuahia North LGA. This was followed by hiring technical experts (M=2.92, SD=0.88), setting up committees (M=2.89, SD=0.86) attending seminars (M=2.82, SD=0.84) and focusing on individual tasks (M=2.79, SD=0.80). the grand mean rating of 2.91, SD=0.86 implies that the participants agree to these as coping strategies secondary school principals employ in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State.

Table 6 Relationship between coping strategies to job-related stress employed and effectiveness of secondary school principals

Variables		Sources of job stress	Effectiveness
Coping strategies	Pearson Correlation	1	.623**
	Sig. (2-tailed)		.000
	N	40	40
Principals Effectiveness	Pearson Correlation	.623**	
	Sig. (2-tailed)	.000	
	N	40	40

The result from table 6 shows the correlation between coping strategies to job-related stress and effectiveness of secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA at 0.623 and the probability at 0.000. This implies that there is a strong relationship between coping strategies to job-related stress and effectiveness of secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State. This means that coping strategies impact on the principals' effectiveness on their job in the study area.

Discussion

The findings show that physical tiredness, emotional strain and mental fatigue are natures of job related stress among principals in Umuahia North L.G.A. this is in consonance with a finding from other parts of the world including waweru (2011) who observed that most principals in Australia get little in the way of administrative support, auxiliary personnel and ground staff hence get stressed as they multi-task in order to ensure that the institutional goals are attained.

The findings from the sources of management related job stress is work overload as numerous expectations and many administrative responsibilities are required to be met and carried out by the principals. Inadequate funds were identified as the third source of job stress. The respondents felt that finances were a major factor in education expansion and access and that schools need them for construction and physical facilities and provision of learning and teaching equipment.

Responses from the respondents showed that curriculum supervision was fourth source of job stress among principals. The school principals are charged with the responsibility of planning, directing, controlling and evaluating instructional programmes and provision of resources for programme implementation. Another source of management related stress indicated in the study was facilities supervision. Facilities in this context refer to classrooms, laboratories, staff offices and furniture for both students and staff which are necessary for smooth running of an institution.

The findings also revealed they were major effects of management related job stress. These effects included, inability to supervise, inability to meet targets, inability to take administrative decisions and inability to attend to staff and student's needs. The finding showed that inability to supervise was common among principals in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State. Respondents observed that principals seem to lack the ability to supervise subordinates when they are under pressure of work.

Finally, responses on management related job stress and coping strategies among secondary school principals in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State, revealed such coping strategies as used by principals in the management of job stress to be delegating duties, hiring technical experts, attending seminars, setting up committees and focusing on individual tasks. The strategies employed by school principals in managing job stress resulting from their administrative roles, delegating duties was identified as a key strategy in managing stress. Majority of the respondents indicated that schools principals need to delegate their work roles and hence allocate enough resources. One of

the principals indicated that failure to delegate projects and activities caused a lot of stress among the principals.

Conclusion

The purpose of the study was to investigate the stress management strategies for effective job performance in secondary schools in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State and the research results revealed that principals do experience stress such as: physical tiredness, emotional strain and mental fatigue while work overload was identified as key factor that contributes to create stressful situations for the principals. The effect of management related job stress include inability to: supervise, meet targets, take administrative decision, attend to staff and students needs which may lead to the administrator quitting the administrative position all together. It was reported that principals should use stress coping strategies which included: delegating duties, setting up committees and focusing on individual tasks to reduce stress management for effective job performance.

Recommendations

The following were recommended based on the findings of the study:

1. The ministry of education should periodically organize seminars and workshops for principals to identify the nature of job stress and its effect on life and duty performance
2. The principals should consciously eliminate the various stressors to achieve high job
3. Principals should be trained by the government and stakeholders to be well equipped for carrying out principal-ship role in the secondary school's administration.
4. Principals should employ participative leadership style in dispensing their duties in the secondary school in Umuahia North LGA, Abia State.

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