

## **RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS AND COPING STRATEGIES OF SECONDARY SCHOOLS TEACHERS IN KADUNA STATE, NIGERIA**

**Dr. A.I. Mohammed**

Department of Educational Psychology and Counselling,  
Faculty of Education,  
Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria

### **Abstract**

*The study was conducted to determine the relationship between stress and coping strategies among teachers in Kaduna State, Nigeria. Two hypotheses were formulated; a Correlation research design was used for the study. A sample of 382 respondents was selected from the population of 59,701 teachers in Kaduna State. Mean, standard deviation and Persons' product Moment Correlation were used to analyses the data at 0.05 levels of significance. Findings reveal significant relationships existed between coping strategies of teachers and stress. Marital status of teachers was also discovered to relate to stress and coping strategies. Based on the outcome of this study, recommendations were made that educative workshops and seminars should be organized from time to time for teachers to know how to cope with teaching stress by using the adaptive coping styles as this will help them in their job performance as teachers. Also, teachers who are single parents should be given special consideration and attention in terms of thorough and consistent counseling and organizing depression-alleviation programs to alleviate their worries and challenges and encourage them for better job performance.*

### **Introduction**

Stress is the abnormal reaction that the organism displays against threatening environmental elements (Luthans, 1994). Stress, which is a general term used for pressure that people are exposed to in life (Jepson & Forrest, 2006) may be defined as the individual harmony effort that the person displays against a stimulant which has excessive psychological and physical pressure on the person (Griffin, 1990). When a person feels insufficient in dealing with demands and challenges faced in life, he or she experiences stress. Being harmed by this situation or taking advantage of it mainly depends on the person because stress may either be a factor threatening the organism physically or psychologically or a power which gives energy in dealing with life (Muthuvelayutham & Mohanasundaram, 2012) giving rise to physical, mental, emotional and social reactions. Sources of stress may be classified as individual, organizational and outside of organization (Kreitner & Kinick, 1992) Organizational stress, which is also called professional stress, is the interaction between working conditions and the working person in environments in which the work demand exceeds the skills of the worker (Tsai, Fung & Chow, 2006). The elements that cause stress in organizations are environmental factors and the

behaviour formed as a result of the pressure of these elements on the individual (Amason, Allen, & Holmes, 1999). These factors may be monotony, change of technology, excessive work load, job security, economy, management problems (Sutherland & Cooper, 1990), the hindrance of the drive of success, personal ambitions, the lack of harmony between person-role (Yates, 1989) and individual characteristics (Tsai, *et al*, 2006), the feeling of insufficiency (Ivancevich, Matteson, Freedman, & Philips 1990). Stress in working people results in various feelings such as worry, fear and depression (Margolis, Kroes, & Quinn, 1974). The first symptoms of stress in workers are; laziness, absenteeism at work (Furnham, 1997) and the decrease in performance and production (Atkinson, 1995).

Teacher stress is defined as experiences in teachers of unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, frustration, anxiety, depression and nervousness, resulting from some aspect of their work as teachers (Tsai, *et al*, 2006). While stress can also be related to apprehension, irritation, agitation, fear, annoyance, mental discomfort, nervous upset, inability to cope, frustration and unhappiness, (1984), Lazarus and Folkman as cited in Nwimo & Onwunaka (2015) defined stress as a relationship between the person and the environment within which the person finds it to be taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being.

Stress does not affect all people equally, but stress can lead to illness and negative experiences. Coping with stress is therefore an important factor, it affects whether and how people search for medical care and social support and how they believe the advice of the professionals (Passer & Smith 2007). The transactional model of Stress and coping strategy (Yumba, 2008), is an approach for evaluating the coping processes of stressful situations. Stressful situations are viewed as the transactions between an individual and the environment. However, the external stressors play an important role in these transactions. Two important types of appraisal characterize these transactions: appraisal of the stressor by the person, and appraisal of the stressor in terms of social and cultural resources available to the person. The first appraisal known also as primary appraisal is resulting from a person examining or appraising the potential threat when facing a stressor. The primary appraisal is described as an individual evaluation of major effects of an event, as stressful, positive, controllable, and challenging or irrelevant. The second appraisal is the assessment of the available resources and options available to a person in order to copy with the actual stressor. It is an appropriate action taking by a person to find a solution (Yumba, 2008).

On the other hand, emotional-focused coping is oriented toward managing the emotions that accompany the perception of stress (Branno & Feist, 2009). The five emotions focused coping strategies identified by folkman and Lazarus as cited in Robinson and Jenefer (2005), are: disclaiming, escape-avoidance, accepting responsibility or blame, exercising self-control, and positive reappraisal. Emotional-focused coping is a mechanism to alleviate distress by minimizing, reducing or preventing the emotional components of a sector (Carver, 2011). This mechanism can be applied through variety of ways, such as seeking social report, reappraising the stressor in a positive light, accepting responsibility, using avoidance, exercising self

control, and distancing (Carver, 2011). The focus of this coping mechanism is to change the meaning of the stressor or transfer attention away from it.

According to Haley (2009), there are three main coping styles that people employ when attempting to resolve stressors. They include problem-focused coping strategy which involves altering or managing the problem that is causing the stress and it is highly action focused. Individuals engaging in problem-focused coping style, focus their attention on gathering the required resources necessary to deal with the stressor. Avoidant coping style can be described as cognitive and behavioral effort directed towards minimizing, denying or ignoring the stressor

In Nigeria, teachers' wage is not commensurate to the demands of their work when compared with other professions. The low income of teachers also poses psychological stress on the teachers and satisfaction at work. Teachers face numerous stressors including students' behavioral problems, heavy workload, dealing with aggressive parents, low pay, maintaining discipline, being evaluated by others, attending after school and evening meetings, lack of stimulation and high societal expectations.

### **Statement of the Problem**

If the human traits determine his exhibited behavior, then there must be a link between the human traits and how individuals perceive stress and cope with the environment, especially with psychological stress or any situation that poses threat to the individual. Teachers experience many different sources of stress which include poor students' behavior, lack of time, teaching a child with disability, inadequate resources, disciplining and handling difficult students and overload of school work (having too many tasks with insufficient time to complete them). All these pose stress on teachers and they must daily cope with these happenings as they relate with their students, administrative head, parents and colleagues. It was against this background the study sort to investigate the relationship between stress and coping strategies of secondary school teachers in Kaduna State Nigeria.

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between stress and coping strategies of teachers?
2. What is the difference in the stress and coping strategies of teachers with different marital status?

### **Research hypotheses**

- Ho<sub>1</sub>: There is no significant relationship between stress and coping strategies of teachers.
- Ho<sub>2</sub>: There is no significant difference in the stress and coping strategies of teachers with different marital status

## **Methodology**

### **Research Design**

Correlation survey research design was used for the study. A correlational study is used when you want to determine if a relationship exists between two or more variable. It allowed the researcher to assess peoples' thoughts and opinions and it involves selecting a sample and predetermined set of questions for the investigation. .

The populations of the study consist of all teachers in both private and public schools in Kaduna State. Statistics from Kaduna State Ministry of Education show that there are 59,701 teachers in both private and public secondary schools in the State. The populations of teachers are widely distributed around 12 educational zones in the state. The educational zones in Kaduna, state are: Rigachikun zone, Zonlcwa zone, Zaria zone, Lere zone, Kaduna zone, Kafanchan zone, Godo-godo zone, Kachia zone, Auchan zone, Giwa zone, BirninGwari zone, and Sabon-Tasha zone. (Source: Kaduna State list of Schools by Zone and by local Government Area, 201)

A total samples size of 382 teachers was randomly selected using stratified sample technique constituted the research sample. They were selected from the (6) educational zones out of the (12) zones.

Two research instruments were used to collect information to achieve the purpose of this study:-

- (i) The Teacher Stress Questionnaire was adapted from Teachers' Stress Inventory revised by Schutz and Long (1988) by the researcher and reviewed to suit the purpose of this study. It identified what type of situations teachers report as being stressful and has an overall stress score of 70 and the lower score of 14. Schutz and Long reported that cronbach's alpha was high in their sample and the coefficient is above .50. This version has 14 items that are rated on a alternative Likert scale. The scale is as follows: Never=5, Rare=4, sometimes=3, often=2, Always=1.
- (ii) The instrument was designed by David Tobin to measure three coping strategies that is avoidant coping strategy, problem focused coping strategy and emotion coping strategy which is measured from its two extremes i.e. emotion engagement and emotion disengagement. The Cronbach's alpha reliability coefficient has been used by the author, to report the coefficient of reliability to range from 0.71 to 0.94. Both Alpha coefficients and the Pearson correlations indicate the scale reliably assesses coping process. The inventory-'consists of 32 items and it designed in a Likert scale with 5 options thus: very much = 5, Much = 4, somewhat = 3, A little = 2, Not at all here are 8 items measuring each coping strategy. The highest possible score in each of the styles is 40 and the minimum score is 8. The coping strategy with the highest score is the strategy peculiar to the individual respondent. Whereas low score indicate strategy were not applicable to the stress full condition.

Validity for the Tobin's coping Strategies Inventory (CSI) has been assessed in a number of ways. These include:

- **Factor Structure:** the factor structure of the CSI supports a hierarchical relationship between the proposed subscales.
- **Criterion Validity:** the successful discrimination between symptomatic and normal samples from several different populations supports the CSI's clinical utility.
- **Construct Validity:** there have been several studies that have looked at the relationship of the CSI to instruments measuring other important constructs in the stress and coping literature. The CSI is particularly predictive of depressive-symptoms for individual who are under high levels of stress.

Two of the instruments are adopted, while one was adapted and have been validated by the expert in the department of educational psychology and counseling, Ahmadu Bello University, Zaria.

The researchers re-established the reliability for the instruments from the result of the pilot study.

A pilot testing was carried out using fifty teachers' in three secondary schools in Zaria and a Cronbach alpha coefficient of 0.78 was established.

A letter of introduction was collected from the department of Educational psychology and Counseling A.B.U., Zaria to the Kaduna State Ministry of Education and principals of the schools in the selected educational zones, introducing the researcher as a student in the department. The researcher then took the letter to the ministry and subsequently was given permission by the principals of the schools to carry out the research among the teachers. The instruments were administered personally by the researcher and by some teachers where necessary. The teachers were requested to respond to the items in the instruments. The respondents were, required to fill it as soon as they were given but in cases where they could not respond immediately, the researcher left the instruments with them for completion and subsequently went back for so many reasons, a total of 462 instruments was distributed and 382 completed and valid instrument was collected at the end of the administration. The instruments was marked and scored accordingly by the researcher. After the data was marked and scored using Microsoft Excel sheets, some statistical tools were used to analyze and interpret the data collected in order to either accept or reject the null Hypotheses of the research. Descriptive Statistics of frequencies and percentage were used to analyze the demographic variables of the respondents. The Pearson product Moment Correlation which is usually used to ascertain the significant relationship among two or more variables was used. All hypotheses were tested at 0.05 levels of significance

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between Stress and Coping strategies among teachers.

**Table 1 the Correlation Analysis of Relationship between Coping Strategies and Stress**

Variables	Mean	Std, Deviation	df	R	P
Stress	38.53	81.66			
Problem Focused Coping	32.43	4.782	381	-0.107	0.036
Emotion engagement	29.16	5.756	381	0.806	0.094
Emotion Disengagement	22.91	6.593	381	0.31	0.000
Avoidance Coping	26.29	5.342	381	0.152	0.003

Data in Table 1 is a breakdown of the existing relationship between each of the coping strategy and stress. The Pearson correlation Table gives the detail thus: There is a significant negative relationship between problem focused coping and stress ( $r=-0.107$ ,  $p=0.036$ ). There is no significant relationship between emotion engagement and stress ( $r=0.086$ ,  $p=0.094$ ). Meanwhile, there is a significant positive correlation between emotion disengagement and stress ( $r=0.313$ ,  $p=0.000$ ) and between avoidance coping and stress ( $r=0.152$ ,  $p=0.003$ ).

**Hypothesis 2a:** There is no significant difference in Stress between Teachers of different Marital Status.

Data in Table 2 show that the single parents have the highest mean score in stress ( $M=42.80$ ,  $S.D=7.932$ ), next to them in stress are the singles ( $M=39.52$ ,

**Table 2 Mean Score of Stress due to Marital Status**

Marital Status	Mean	N	Std. Deviation
Single	39.52	171	7.909
Married	37.14	181	8.204
Single Parent	42.80	25	7.932
Total	38.59	377	8.192

$S.D=7.909$ ) while the married have the lowest mean score in stress ( $M=37.14$ ,  $S.D=8.204$ ).

**Table 3: One way ANOVA of differences in Stress coping strategies due to Marital Status**

	Sum of Square	df	Mean	F	Sig
Between Groups	19.772	42	.471	1.314	.101
Within Groups	119.687	334	.358		
Total	139.459	376			

Data in Table 2 show no significant difference in stress coping strategies of teachers of different marital status ( $F=1.314, p=0.101$ ).

### Discussion

The result show that there is a significant negative relationship between problem focused coping and stress, there is no significant relationship between emotion engagement and stress, there is a significant positive correlation between emotion disengagement and stress and between avoidance coping and stress of teachers. This finding is supported by the research carried out by Harley (2009) Cawer (2011) and Yunusa (2008) which shows that problem focused coping is the most effective at reducing psychological distress in general populations. The finding showed that problem focused coping was associated with reduced depressive symptoms. He also reveals strong positive association between avoidant and psychological distress. The findings show that teachers who are single parents have the highest mean core in stress; next to them in stress are the singles while the married have the lowest mean core in stress. This might be due to the fact there is no spouse to unburden their heart to when they are stressed, and it may also be because of the additional responsibility of taking care of the children and footing the bills alone. This finding is supported by the research of Tsal et al, (2006), Yate (1989) and Robinson Etal (2005) who found that marital status of female teachers significantly influence the stress experienced by them. Women who are divorced, according to their findings, experienced more stress than those who are singles while those are single, experienced more stress than the married.

The findings of this research also shows that significant differences existed in types of coping of problem focused, emotion engagement, and avoidance coping due to married status, but that teachers differ significantly in emotion disengagements due to their marital status. The mean score of teachers who are single parents significantly differ in emotion disengagement from those who are single and married. Married teachers do not differ significantly from singles in emotion disengagement coping. This emotion disengagement attitude such as venting of emotion, withdrawal and rumination (deep thinking) majorly used by single parents must have resulted from the peculiarity of marital status

### Conclusion

The more problem focused a teacher is, the lesser the stress he/she will experience. Teachers who make use of emotion engagement are not likely going to feel stressed in most threatening situation while those who face challenges with emotion disengagement and avoidance coping will experience high level of stress. The marital status of teachers can influence stress. The single parents have the highest mean score in stress followed by the singles, while the married have the lowest mean score in stress. Marital stability was found to have a powerful influence on stress. Married teachers have less stressful condition.

### Recommendation

Based on the findings of this research, the following recommendations were reached:

The study showed that there are adaptive ways and maladaptive ways of coping with stress. The researcher therefore, suggests that Educative workshops and seminars should be organized from time to time for teachers so that those using the negative coping styles will know how to correctly cope with teaching stress by using the adaptive coping styles. This will help their better job performance as teachers. Marital status has been found to greatly affect stress experience, coping and the personality traits of single parents, therefore, the researcher suggest that teacher who is single parents should be given special consideration and attention in terms of effective and consistent counseling and organizing a depression-alleviation programmes probably by the society for Family Health and the Ministry of Education to alleviate their worries and challenges.

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