

**WORKPLACE STRESS AN COPING STRATEGIES AMONG SENIOR CIVIL SERVANTS IN KOGI STATE, NIGERIA****Joseph Afolayan Adegboyega\*, Sunday Abdul Sheidu**\* Department of Human Kinetics & Health Education, Ekiti State University, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria  
M.Ed. Government Secondary School, Kuroko adavi, Kogi State, Nigeria**DOI: 10.5281/zenodo.293767****KEYWORDS:** Stressors, Coping Strategy, Civil Servant, Wear and Tear.**ABSTRACT**

This study investigated workplace stress and coping strategies adopted by senior civil servants in Kogi State, Nigeria. It also examined the level of stress and the relationship between stressors and stress. The study is considered significant because it would serve as a guide to the state government to develop appropriate stress-reducing programmes for the senior civil servants. Descriptive research design was adopted for the study. A total of 500 respondents were sampled using the multistage sampling techniques. Data were collected with the use of a validated questionnaire. Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain the internal consistency of the instrument. Descriptive statistics were used to answer the research questions while the hypotheses formulated were tested using Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression analyses. The study revealed a moderate stress level among the respondents. A significant relationship existed between stressors and stress. Also, the study revealed that all the predictor variables are factors that could exert influence on strategies for coping with stress. However, sex of the respondents was the best predictor in stress coping strategies. Based on the findings of the study, workshops and seminars that focus on occupational stress and coping strategies should be organized on regular basis by the Civil Service Commission in Kogi State for the senior civil servants.

**INTRODUCTION**

The workplace in the 21st century is a fast paced, dynamic, highly stimulating environment which brings a large number of benefits and opportunities to those who work within it. The ever changing demands of the working class can increase the level of stress especially for those who are consistently working under pressure such as top and middle management groups. Pressure has its positive side in raising performance but if such pressure becomes excessive it can lead to stress with its negative consequences. The executive groups are not only its key victims, it cuts across all strata of the society such as men, women, children, labourers, businessmen and professionals.

Stress is an inevitable and unavoidable component of life due to expectations, complexities and competitiveness in modern society. In the fast changing world of technology, today, no individual is free from stress whether it is within the family, organization, work or any social or economy activities. Workplace stress has attracted considerable attention in recent times especially within the context – of organizational behaviour (Kazmi, Amjad & Khan, 2008). However, when individuals experience stress or face demanding situation, they adopt ways of dealing with it as they cannot remain in a continued state of tension. Coping refers to how individuals deal with stressful situation. It is the use of strategies to deal with the problems, real or anticipated. This approach helps workers to manage the distressing problems and emotions in their lives.

Stress is quite an elusive term to define as its perception varies from one individual to another. It can be equated with physical, psychological pressure acting on the individual which generate anxiety and impair performance. Stress is caused by a variety of situations and conditions. The stressors among workers as found in contemporary literature can be classified into five (5) principal groups (Davis & McKay, 2000). These include self-induced stressors, environmental stressors, organizational stressors, social stressors and emotional stressor. The key point is that these different stressors may elicit a similarly stress response in the body. Therefore, the stressor is the cause, and the stress is the physiological response the body makes to any stressors.

Self-induced stressors are created by the individual himself through his action. For example, some individuals through their perception of life, their expectations and value systems, their belief systems, impose excessive



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demands and unrealistic and unprincipled high standards on themselves, thereby creating their own unique and endogenous stressors (Agulana, 2001). The desire to excel above others could be very strong in an individual, to the point of overtaking the ability to achieve the self-imposed target and the desire to excel above others may put unimaginable pressure on individuals.

Environmental stressors are those external factors, which directly have impact either negatively or positively on workers,. These include the accommodation and accompanying facilities like water, electricity, social amenities necessary for conducive environment. This also includes political instability, poor economy, bad weather, violence, noise and air pollution, poor time management such as having to waste time in a long queue in banks, fuelling station and traffic. Unsatisfactory work environment and inadequate materials in the offices seem to be among sources of incessant industrial actions by workers and various Unions agitations in organizations (Ajala, 2001).

The climate that persists in an organization can be potential source of stressors. The freedom given to plan schedule of duties, participation in decision-making, sense of belonging, free and fair communication and sympathetic approach towards personal problem were considered as stressors in organizational climate. Experience has shown that achievement will bring joy and fulfillment to the workers if they are part of the organization in their own little way to achieve organizational goal. Where there is a poor interpersonal relationship within and between the superiors and subordinates, there is bound to be a poor emotional climate – which may result to low productivity. Also, it may have great impact on the emotional health of both the boss and subordinates with development of other serious health problems such as hypertension, and mental illness (Achal, 1995). Negative emotions expressed by individual include over-reaction, malice, anger, bitterness, depression and fighting. Obviously,, all human beings need affections, security, self-respect, independence, acceptance, recognition and justice. A persistent disturbance in any of these emotional needs may likely produce great changes in the personality of an individual.

Gender differences in stressful situations are important in determining individual's vulnerability to stress and their ability to cope under such circumstances. Study has shown that females suffered more workplace stress than their male counterparts (Mitchell, 2010). Similarly, age is another sector which may have influence on job stress. For instance, Dianne (2007) revealed that younger employees between ages 30 and 35 years, showed the highest levels of stress. This was surprising because it was a period of adjustment in their life, when they are leaving school and training to get a job.

In order to contain the adverse effect of stress, a person will have to learn the coping strategies, which include either the removal of oneself from the environment that generates the stress or changes his perception of the situation that make him susceptible to excessive stress. The goals or coping include the desire to maintain a sense of personal integrity and to achieve greater personal control over the environment. Given the stressful nature of today's workplace and understanding that stress in excess can have health consequences, it is important that senior civil servants learn to identify the signs and symptoms of stress so as to be able to cope with them.

Effective coping requires recognition of stressors, as well as how the body is reacting to them. This involves among others, self-observation and a concerted attempt to identify the signs of stress. Self-analysis may reveal that the problem is physical caused by fatigue, poor nutrition or insufficient sleep. In addition, it could be emotional and psychological caused by financial problems, which may lead to modification of behaviour appraisal of situation help in reducing stress and its related problems.

Observations by the researchers have shown that data are not readily available in Kogi State, Nigeria with reference to the current state of stress among the senior civil servants. However, it is not out of place to reason that the depressed economy, job insecurity, work overload, delayed promotion, irregular payment of salaries, un-conducive work environment and incessant strikes may make the health of the senior civil servant to wear faster than normal. It is against this background that the study investigated stress and coping strategies adopted by senior civil servants in Kogi State, Nigeria.



## RESEARCH QUESTIONS

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1) To what extent do the senior civil servants in Kogi State experience stress?
- 2) What are the types of stressors experienced by senior civil servants?
- 3) What are the coping strategies employed for reducing stress among senior civil servants in Kogi State.

## RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS

The following hypothesis were tested at  $p < 0.05$  level of significance

- 1) There is no significant relationship between the identified stressors (self-induced, environmental, organizational, psychosocial stressors) and stress among senior civil servants in Kogi State, Nigeria
- 2) Demographic variables (sex, age, marital status, position and level of salary scale) will not contribute significantly to coping strategies among the senior civil servants.

## METHODS

The study adopted a descriptive research design. This research design was considered appropriate because it describes the existing situation regarding the respondent's level of stress and coping strategies.

The population for this study consisted of all senior civil servants on grade level 13 and above in the 13 Ministries in Kogi State. A sample of 500 senior civil servants were selected by purposive sampling technique after they have indicated their consents and willingness to participate in the study. The respondents were stratified to ensure fair representation from each participating Ministry, considering sex, grade level and marital status. A total of 321 males and 179 female respondents participated in the study.

The instrument used for this study was a structured questionnaire developed by the researchers on the bases on literature relating to stress and its coping strategies. The instrument consisted of three sections – A, B & C. Section A was designed to elicit information on the profile of the respondents such as sex, age, marital status, position and grade level. Section B consisted of 30 items identified as stressors arising from self-induced, environmental, organizational, psychosocial and emotional factors, while section C consisted of 15 items on the various strategies of coping with stress. All the items in sections B and C are on 4-point modified Likert-type scale weighted, strongly agree – 4; Agree – 3; Disagree – 2 and strongly disagree -1. The decision point was put at 2.50 as previously used by Obidike and Onwuka (2013). This therefore, implied that a mean rating of less than 2.50 was categorized as “disagree” while a mean rating of 2.50 and above was “agree”.

The face and content validity of the instrument were determined by three health educationists. Cronbach's Alpha was used to ascertain the reliability of the instrument. The reliability coefficient of 0.84 obtained was considered high enough for the instrument. Copies of the questionnaire were administered by the researchers with the aid of five research assistants who monitored the respondents and made sure that the questionnaire items were completed properly. The respondents were given sufficient time to respond to the questionnaire items in their offices without comparing notes among themselves. The data collected for the study were analysed using descriptive statistics while inferential statistics used included Pearson's Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regression analysis. The hypotheses formulated for the study were tested at 0.05 level of significance.

## RESULTS

### Descriptive Analysis

Research questions 1: To what extent do the senior civil servants in Kogi State express stress?

The level of stress experienced by senior civil servants is presented in table 1

*Table 1: Level of Stress experienced by Senior Civil Servants*

Level of stress	Range	Frequency	Percentage
Low	31.00 – 70.80	208	41.6
Moderate	70.81 – 94.47	217	43.4
High	94.48 – 124.00	75	15.0
Total		500	100.00



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Table 1 shows that the respondents were categorized into “low”, “moderate” and “high” level of stress using the computed mean score (82.64), minimum score (31.0), maximum score (124.0) and standard deviation (11.82) on stress. The low level of stress experienced by the respondents ranged from the minimum score (31.0) to the difference between the mean score (82.64) and the standard deviation (11.84) that is, low level:  $82.64 - 11.84 = 70.80$  – The high level of stress ranged from the sum of mean score and standard deviation ( $82.64 + 11.84 = 94.48$ ). High level:  $94.48 - 124.00$ . The mean score (82.64) constitute the moderate level group, i.e. moderate level:  $70.81 - 94.47$ . Also, the table shows that 41.6% of the total sample experienced low level of stress while 43.4% and 15% had moderate and high level of stress respectively. This implies that the level of stress among the respondents was moderate.

Research question 2: What are the types of stressors experienced by senior civil servants?

Table 2 below shows the types of stressors experienced by the respondents.

**Table 2: Types of stressors experienced by respondents**

Source	$\bar{X}$	SD	Decision Rule
Self-Induced stressors	2.54	1.01	Agreed
Environmental Stressors	2.91	0.83	Agreed
Organisational Stressors	2.80	0.87	Agreed
Psychosocial Stressors	2.64	0.91	Agreed
Emotional Stressors	2.54	1.01	agreed

Table 2 shows that there were differences in the mean scores of respondents with respect to the various aspects of stressors. Using a cut off mean of 2.50 as the decision rule, all the items (stressors) had mean scores above the cut off mean score. This implies that the identified stressors in this study (self-induced, environmental, organisational, psychosocial and emotional stressors) constitute stressors among the respondents.

Research question 3: What are the coping strategies employed for reducing stress among senior civil servants?

Table 3 below shows the mean scores of respondents on coping strategies for reducing stress

**Table 3: Mean scores of respondents on coping strategies for reducing stress**

Source	$\bar{X}$	Decision Rule
Proper planning and scheduling one's work	2.88	Agreed
Re-evaluates the way in which stressful events can be handled	2.91	Agreed
Turn to relations and friends for succour	2.53	Agreed
Using alcohol or other drugs	2.20	agreed
Behaving aggressively or abusively during the period of stress	2.53	Agreed
Always sleep enough	2.95	Agreed
Avoid sleeping excessively as a response to stressful change	2.78	Agreed
Always decentralized my duties and back it up with responsibilities	2.92	Agreed
Always participate in physical activity to relieve stress	2.97	Agreed
Always practice stress management skills such as diaphragmatic breathing	2.90	Agreed
Manage my time effectively	3.24	Agreed
Always turn to God for help when one is anxious about life	3.22	Agreed
Do a lot of mental practice and positive imagery to deal with stress at work	2.87	Agreed
Consultation with superiors or subordinates	3.04	Agreed
Plan my daily routine or programme before acting	3.20	agreed

Table 3 shows that the mean scores vary for each area of behaviour for coping with stress. Using the previous rating criteria used in this study, the respondents had a mean score of 2.50 above the cutoff point in all the strategies for coping with stress except the use of drugs or alcohol. This implies that all the identified strategies except the use of drugs or alcohol were the coping strategies used by the respondents.



### HYPOTHESES TESTING

**Hypothesis 1:** There is no significant relationship between the identified stressors (self-induced, environmental, organisational and psychosocial stressors) and stress among senior civil servant.

Table 4 below shows the results of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation analysis on stressors and stress among the respondents.

*Table 4: Summary of Pearson's Product Moment Correlation Analysis on Stressors and Stress*

Source	N	$\bar{X}$	SD	$r_{cal}$	$r_{table}$
Self-Induced stressors	500	18.27	2.77	0.386*	0.195
Environmental stressors	500	68.03	9.30	0.241*	0.195
Organisational stressors	500	22.47	3.49	0.350*	0.195
Psychosocial stressors	500	15.81	3.16	0.404*	0.195

\*  $P < 0.05$

Table 4 shows that the 'r' calculated is greater than the 'r' table value of 0.195 in all the major areas of identified stressors in the study. This implies that there is a significant relationship between each of the categories of stressors and stress. Thus, the stressors identified in this study were the cause of stress among the respondents.

**Hypothesis 2:** Demographic variables (sex, age, marital status, position and level of salary scale) will not contribute significantly to coping strategies among the senior civil servants.

Table 5 below shows the results of Multiple Regression analysis on the contribution of demographic variables to stress among senior civil servants.

*Table 5: Summary of Multiple Regression analysis on coping strategies*

Model	Unstandardized coefficients		Standardized coefficients	T	Sig
	B	Std Error	Beta		
Constant	44.837	1.265		35.444	.000
Sex	.376	.472	.038	0.797	.425
Age	-.352	.272	-.067	-1.294	.197
Marital Status	-.050	.417	-.006	-.120	.904
Position	-.243	.214	-.051	-1.136	.256
Level of Salary	-.439	.249	-.086	-1.763	.079

\*  $P < 0.05$

Multiple R = 0.156, Multiple  $R^2 = 0.024$ ; Adjusted  $R^2 = 0.014$ ; F = 2.452

Table 5 shows that the demographic variables such as sex, age, marital status, position and level of salary scale contributed significantly to coping strategies among the respondents ( $F_{5,494} = 2.452$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The null hypothesis was therefore rejected. This implies that demographic variables contributed significantly to coping strategies among the respondents. It was further revealed that there was a significant positive but low multiple correlation between the predictor variables (sex, age, marital status, position and salary level) and stress among the respondents ( $r = 0.156$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). This implies that all the predictor variables are factors that can exert influence on coping strategies among the respondents. However, sex was the best predictor variable that contributed to the total variance in stress coping strategies among the respondents ( $\beta = 0.038$ ) while the least predictor of coping strategies was salary level ( $\beta = 0.086$ ).

### DISCUSSION

The findings of this study revealed that the level of stress among the senior civil servants sampled for the present study was moderate. The moderate level of stress by the respondents might not be unconnected with the experiences of the workers on the job. This may probably be so because the relationship among the senior officers was tolerable. This finding was in line with the study of Ukeje (1992) who opined that when various forms of





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responsibilities are assigned to employees with well defined task that are challenging, they feel happy, satisfied and perform better.

The finding of this study showed a significant relationship between all the stressors and stress. The reason for this could be attributed to the inevitability and universality of stress and could also be based on the fact that the working environment was stress prone with various stressors which individuals cannot escape. Previous researchers had found out a significant relationship between stressors and stress. For instance, a significant relationship between self-induced stressors and stress was reported by Gamling and Augerbach (2003); environmental stressors and stress (Vernon, 1997); organisational stressors and stress (Omegbunam, 2004) and recently, a significant relationship between all the identified stressors and stress was revealed by Akindutire, Adegboyega and Adigun (2012).

Another key finding in this study showed that sex of respondents was the best predictor variable that contributed to the total variance in stress coping strategies while the salary level of respondents was the least predictor in stress coping strategies. However, previous researchers did not focus their studies on this important aspect of strategies for coping with stress.

### CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that stress among the senior civil servant in Kogi State, Nigeria was related to various stressors such as self-induced, environmental, organisational and psychosocial stressors. Demographic variables like sex, age, marital status, position and salary scale were important factors related to stress and coping strategies among the senior civil servants. However, sex of respondents was the best predictor of strategies for coping with stress. The State Government in Kogi State, Nigeria should provide stress free and conducive environment to enable the senior civil servants performing their duties without stress. Also, workshops and in-service seminars that focus on occupational stressors and effective coping strategies should be organized for all the senior civil servants in Kogi State, Nigeria.

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