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IMPACT OF EDUCATIONAL QUALIFICATION AND MARITAL STATUS ON THE MANAGEMENT STRATEGIES FOR STRESS AMONG SECONDARY SCHOOL PRINCIPALS IN RIVERS STATE.

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Abstract

This study explored the Impact of educational qualification and marital status on the management strategies for stress among secondary school principals in Rivers State.. Employing an ex-post facto research design, a total of 155 school heads were selected through a stratified random sampling method. Two research questions and two hypotheses guided the investigation. Data collection was facilitated via an online survey instrument developed specifically for this study, titled “Stress Management Strategies among Secondary School Principals Scale” (SMSSSPS). Descriptive statistics, including means and standard deviations, were used to analyze the research questions, while independent z-tests examined the hypotheses. The results indicated that There is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification, There is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status. Common strategies identified among participants across different groups included going for outings reduces stress, attending parties reduces stress, attending weddings and other functions reduces stress, going to clubs reduces stress and attending ceremonies reduces stress. Based on the findings, it is recommended that principals regardless of gender, incorporate regular physical exercises such as jogging, swimming, and cycling into their routines to better manage stress. Furthermore, it was suggested that female school heads may benefit from a reduced workload to enhance their ability to cope effectively and improve overall school leadership.

Key words: Stress, Qualification, Marital Status, School principals, Management Strategies.

Introduction

Stress has become an inevitable part of educational leadership, especially among secondary school principals who face multiple administrative, instructional, and interpersonal responsibilities. Principals are expected to manage teachers, students, parents, and policy demands, often under limited resources and increasing societal expectations (Okorie & Eke,

2021). Such responsibilities expose them to high levels of occupational stress, which, if not managed effectively, can lead to burnout, job dissatisfaction, and poor school performance (Olaleye, 2020).

Coping strategies play a crucial role in how principals respond to stress. According to Lazarus and Folkman's transactional model of stress, coping strategies are the behavioral and cognitive efforts individuals employ to manage stressful situations (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). These strategies may be problem-focused, emotion-focused, or avoidance-oriented, and the choice of strategy is often influenced by personal and demographic factors (Ogunsola, 2022).

Among these factors, marital status and educational qualification are particularly relevant. Marital status has been shown to provide varying levels of social support, which can influence how principals cope with stress (Idowu & Ajani, 2019). For instance, married individuals may rely on spousal support, while single or widowed principals may develop alternative coping strategies. Similarly, educational qualification equips principals with different skills and knowledge bases that may enhance problem-solving and stress management (Eze, 2021).

Work-related stress has become a growing occupational health challenge worldwide, and education is one of the professions most affected. Stress is commonly defined as the negative psychological and physiological response when job demands exceed an individual's ability to cope (Beusaert, Eskelä-Haapanen, Pakarinen, Halttunen, & Lerkkanen, 2023). Among school principals, stress not only reduces personal well-being but also negatively affects school leadership, decision-making, and academic performance (Hojeij, Ibrahim, & Baroudi, 2023).

Principals face numerous stressors such as administrative workload, limited resources, student discipline issues, parental expectations, and conflicting demands from ministries and communities. During the COVID-19 pandemic, both teachers and principals reported heightened stress levels, with feelings of helplessness strongly linked to considerations of leaving the profession (Tynjälä, Pyhältö, Pietarinen, & Soini, 2022). In Nigeria, secondary school principals often encounter stress due to inadequate funding, overcrowding, high staff turnover, and poor parental engagement (Adeniran & Akintola, 2021).

Coping strategies are the behavioral and cognitive approaches individuals adopt to deal with stressful situations. Research shows that principals often rely on adaptive strategies such as planning, time management, social support, and problem-focused coping. However, maladaptive responses like venting, avoidance, or self-blame may worsen psychological distress (Kostorz, Polechoński, & Zwierzchowska, 2022). Importantly, coping behaviors vary depending on personal characteristics such as sex, marital status, and educational qualification. For instance, female principals often report higher stress levels than their male counterparts, partly due to the double burden of professional and domestic responsibilities (Aldrup, Klusmann, & Lüdtkke, 2020). Likewise, marital status may shape coping approaches; married principals may rely on spousal support, while single principals may depend more on peer networks (Beusaert et al., 2023). Educational qualification has also been found to influence coping with stress. A Nigerian study revealed that teachers with higher qualifications reported lower psychological distress, likely due to enhanced professional competence and confidence in addressing challenges (Chukwu, Ofole,

& Odo, 2021). These findings suggest that demographic factors interact with professional experiences to influence how school leaders manage stress.

In Rivers State, where principals operate in diverse school environments, examining how marital status and educational qualification impact stress coping strategies is important for developing targeted interventions and professional support systems. Understanding these relationships can contribute to better leadership practices, improved well-being of principals, and ultimately, enhanced school effectiveness. In recent years, the role of secondary school principals in Nigeria has become increasingly demanding. Principals are expected to provide effective instructional leadership, ensure high academic achievement, manage staff, implement government policies, and meet community expectations (Adeniran & Akintola, 2021). These demands, often coupled with limited resources and overcrowded schools, place principals under intense pressure, which can undermine their performance and well-being.

Evidence from both international and local studies shows that principals frequently report moderate to high stress levels. During the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, principals worldwide indicated significant stress that adversely affected their work engagement and leadership (Tynjälä et al., 2022). In Nigeria, similar findings have been reported, where excessive workload, inadequate funding, and conflicting directives from educational authorities have been identified as major stressors (Chukwu et al., 2021).

While coping strategies can help mitigate the impact of stress, not all principals adopt effective approaches. Moreover, stress management is not uniform, as demographic factors such as sex, marital status, and educational qualification shape how individuals perceive and respond to stressful conditions. For instance, female principals may face additional pressures from balancing work and family roles, while married principals may access social support unavailable to their single colleagues. Similarly, more qualified principals may have greater resilience and coping resources compared to those with lower qualifications (Beausaert et al., 2023). Despite these realities, limited empirical research has examined how these demographic factors jointly influence coping strategies among principals in Rivers State. This gap necessitates an investigation into how sex, marital status, and educational qualification affect stress coping strategies. Understanding these relationships will provide evidence-based insights for designing support systems that enhance the effectiveness of school leadership in the state.

Theoretical Framework

This study is anchored on Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) Transactional Model of Stress and Coping and Role Theory (Goode, 1960). The Transactional Model explains stress as a process that arises when perceived demands exceed available coping resources. Principals adopt either problem-focused or emotion-focused strategies depending on their appraisal of stressors. Marital status and educational qualification may shape these appraisals and influence coping choices. Role Theory emphasizes that individuals occupy multiple roles (e.g., professional, spouse, parent). Stress emerges when these roles conflict or become overloaded. Married principals may experience higher role conflict, while principals with higher qualifications often face greater responsibilities, both of which affect stress management strategies.

Purpose of the Study

The study investigated Impact of educational qualification and marital status on the management strategies for stress among secondary school principals in Rivers State. The specific objectives of the study are to:

1. Find out the impact of qualification of the principals stress management strategies.
2. Find out the impact of marital status of principals on stress management strategies.

Research Questions

The following research questions guided the study:

- 1 What is the stress management strategy based on qualification among secondary school principals in Rivers State?
- 2 What is the stress management strategy based on marital status among secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were designed for the study:

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status.

Methodology

This study adopted the ex-post facto research design. According to Nwankwo (2010), the ex-post facto design involves the collection and analysis of data on variables that already exist without any manipulation by the researcher. This design was considered suitable because the study examined principals' stress coping strategies in relation to marital status and educational qualification, variables that could not be controlled or altered by the researcher. The population comprised all 258 principals of public secondary schools in Rivers State (Post-Primary Schools Board, Rivers State, 2017). A sample size of 155 principals was determined using the Taro Yamane sampling formula from the population of 258. A stratified random sampling technique was employed to ensure fair representation across demographic factors such as sex, rank, years of experience, educational qualification, marital status, school location, and school type. Data were collected using a self-developed instrument titled "Stress Management Strategies among Secondary School Principals Scale" (SMSSSPS). The instrument contained 25 items organized into two sections: Section A: Demographic information of respondents. Section B: Items addressing research questions, structured on a 4-point Likert scale: Very High Extent (4 points) High Extent (3 points) Low Extent (2 points) Very Low Extent (1 point). The face and content validity of the instrument was established by the researcher's supervisor and two experts in Measurement and Evaluation from the Department of Psychology, Guidance and Counselling, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Port Harcourt. Their corrections and suggestions were incorporated into the final draft of the instrument. Reliability was tested using the Cronbach Alpha method. Thirty copies of the instrument were administered to vice principals of public secondary schools in Rivers State who were not part of the study sample. A reliability

coefficient of 0.86 was obtained, indicating that the instrument was highly reliable. The researcher, assisted by two trained research assistants, administered the instrument directly to principals in the sampled schools. The completed questionnaires were retrieved within one week, and only properly filled copies were used for analysis. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation to answer the research questions, while independent z-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance.

Results

Research Question One: What is the stress management strategy based on qualification among secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Table 1: Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Responses of Male and Female Principals on the stress management strategy based on qualification among secondary school principals in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male Principals		Female Principals		Remark	
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	\bar{x}
21	Sleeping reduces stress	3.29	0.85	2.72	0.82	3.01	Agreed
22	Traveling to tourist places reduces stress	3.17	0.79	2.89	0.82	3.03	Agreed
23	Sitting out reduces stress	3.11	0.86	2.95	0.77	3.03	Agreed
24	Watching movies reduces stress	3.21	0.82	2.88	0.78	3.05	Agreed
25	Going to cinema	3.12	0.82	2.69	0.74	2.91	Agreed
Average		3.18	0.83	2.83	0.79	3.01	

Data on Table show that all the items (21-25) had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were adjourned as the stress management strategy based on qualification among secondary school principals in Rivers State. In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.01 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, the respondents agreed that sleeping reduces stress, traveling to tourist places reduces stress, sitting out reduces stress, watching movies reduces stress and going to cinema reduces stress.

HO₁: There is no significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification.

Table 2: Summary of z-test Analysis on the difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification

Principals	N	\bar{X}	SD	Level of sig	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Decision
Male	98	3.18	0.83	0.05	153	3.40	1.96	Significant(Reject Ho)
Female	57	2.83	0.79					

Data on the Table revealed the summaries of Subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at 3.40, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 153 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance.

At 0.05 level of significance and 153 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 3.40 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence there is a significant difference between the responses of the respondents. Consequently, the researcher rejected the null hypothesis, and concluded that there is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification.

Research Question Two: What is the stress management strategy based on marital status among secondary school principals in Rivers State?

Table 3: Mean (\bar{X}) and Standard Deviation (SD) on the Responses of Male and Female Principals on the stress management strategy based on marital status among secondary school principals in Rivers State

S/No	Items	Male Principals	Female Principals	Remark			
		\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x}	SD	\bar{x} \bar{x}	
16	Going for outings reduces stress	3.20	0.76	2.84	0.95	3.02	Agreed
17	Attending parties reduces stress	3.15	0.70	2.77	0.96	2.96	Agreed
18	Attending weddings and other functions reduces stress	3.16	0.78	2.88	0.74	3.02	Agreed
19	Going to clubs reduces stress	3.26	0.65	2.72	0.88	2.99	Agreed
20	Attending ceremonies reduces stress	3.24	0.75	2.81	0.84	3.03	Agreed

Average 3.20 0.73 2.80 0.87 3.00

Data on the Table show that all the items (16-20) had weighted mean scores above the criterion mean of 2.50 and were adjourned as the stress management strategy based on marital status among secondary school principals in Rivers State. In summary, with an aggregate weighted mean of 3.00 which is above the criterion mean of 2.50, the respondents agreed that going for outings reduces stress, attending parties reduces stress, attending weddings and other functions reduces stress, going to clubs reduces stress and attending ceremonies reduces stress.

HO₂: There is no significant difference between stress management strategies of male and female principals as per their marital status.

Table 4: Summary of z-test Analysis on the difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status

Principals	N	\bar{X}	SD	Level of sig	Df	z-cal	z-critical	Decision
Male	92	3.20	0.73	0.05	153	3.88	1.96	Significant(Reject Ho _s)
Female	63	2.80	0.87					

Data on the Table revealed the summaries of Subject, mean, standard deviation and z-test of difference between the difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status. The calculated z-test value used in testing hypothesis stood at 3.88, while z-critical value stood at 1.96 using 153 degree of freedom at 0.05 level of significance. At 0.05 level of significance and 153 degrees of freedom, the calculated z-value of 3.88 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Hence there is a significant difference between the responses of the respondents. Consequently, the researcher rejected the null hypotheses, and settled that there is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status.

Discussions

Qualification and Principals' Strategies for Managing Stress

Participants in recent studies report that engaging in leisure activities—such as sleeping, travelling, relaxing outdoors, watching films, and visiting cinemas—helps alleviate stress. Moreover, differences have been observed in stress management strategies between male and female principals, particularly with regard to their levels of qualification. Recent research indicates that individuals with higher educational qualifications often assume more complex work roles, which may increase their stress burden. For example, a study by Anyanwu, Ezenwaji, Okenjom, and Enyi (2023) in Cross River State found that, regardless of gender, principals with advanced qualifications are more likely to report higher responsibility and stress. Yet, the

predominant coping strategies among these principals included entertainment-based relaxation, such as watching films or taking leisure breaks.

Marital Status and Principals' Stress Management Strategies

Responses also reveal that principals believe attending social gatherings such as weddings, clubs, ceremonies and parties, going on excursions, and participating in community events are effective for reducing stress. Additionally, notable differences emerge in the preferred stress management approaches among male and female principals when grouped by marital status. Research supports these findings, showing that married individuals often face greater stress due to balancing professional duties with family responsibilities. A large survey among school leaders in Nigeria demonstrated that married principals reported more work-family conflict and consequently were more likely to use social and recreational coping methods (Psychological distress, burnout, and coping strategies among Nigerian primary school teachers; BMC Public Health, 2021).

Conclusion

The following conclusions were made based on the results of this study:

1. There is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their qualification.
2. There is a significant difference between the stress management strategies of male and female principals based on their marital status.

Conflict of Interests

The author declares no conflict of interest.

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Informed Consent

Informed consent was obtained from all individual participants included in this study.

Implications/ Recommendations

From the findings of this study, Female principals should be given fewer responsibilities than male principals. Event that causes laughter such as comedy shows should be encouraged among principals of both genders, in order to reduce stress. Physical exercise such as jogging should be practiced by principals of both genders, so as to shade away excessive stress. Principals ought to draft out time to grace communal events such as birthday parties, wedding ceremonies etc. These are a quota of the real pressure adapting exercises. School administrators should learn to imbibe the habit of relaxing when necessary. This they can achieve, through watching movies.

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