

# STRESS COPING MECHANISMS AND WORK OUTPUT OF JUNIOR STAFF IN THE ADMINISTRATIVE DIRECTORATE OF STATE SECONDARY EDUCATION BOARD, UYO

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## **Abstract**

This research examined the influence of stress and coping mechanisms on the junior staff work output of the Administrative Directorate of State Secondary Education Board, Uyo, Akwa Ibom State. Three null hypotheses were postulated for the study and tested at 0.05 level of significance. A simple random sampling technique was employed in selecting sample size of 150 respondents out of 1059 population size. The instrument used in data collection was a researcher developed questionnaire, t-test was used in testing the hypotheses. The findings revealed that the stressors significantly influenced the work output of the junior staff of the Directorate. It was also revealed that daily stress and hassles did more damage to workers than related stresses. It was recommended that government and other concerned bodies should have holistic view of working conditions of junior staff in order to reduce the incidences of anxiety, aggressiveness, conflicts in interpersonal relationship and to enhance effective productivity.

Perusal of professional journals in Education during 1990s showed articles involving the term stress. The tenure of some articles is that some stress is job-related due to long hours, heavy responsibilities and continued pressure which make job stressful (Rice, 1998). Cole (2000) asserted that factors in environment that could cause stress are economic situations, development of new technology and political changes. These factors seem to suggest that people who like their occupation and whose work offers opportunities to use their talents and skills and provide status, recognition and pleasant associations are less likely to experience job-related stress than those who are dissatisfied with their jobs.

On the other hand (Rice, 1998) later in the year explained that work that requires constant vigilance truly exposes the workers to uncertainty or danger which can result in stress, the work air traffic controllers is an admired example. They never know when an accident is imminent. On the job, they must be at alert at all times. Charles (1990) pointed out that stress is not only limited to unpleasant situations, hence both the good things that happen to us as well as the bad ones cause stress because they carry with them objective demands that require change or adaptation if an individual is to meet his or her needs. A promotion at work is satisfying but it brings with it the need to relate with new people in new ways to learn to do new things and perhaps to dress differently and keep different working hours.

According to Schuler (1998) the most common conditions that produce stress in work are excessive workloads, dissatisfaction with one's job, or one's employer working condition, competition in the workplace or conflicts produced by trying to work while raising one's children.

Others are the need to satisfy the basic needs of life, that is, food, shelter, water and or the need for recognition, social approval prestige or power and the need for self-esteem, comfort, achievements or warmth. However, the amount of stress depends particularly on the severity of the circumstances and the duration of the exposure (Rice, 1998). Rice explained that some situations can by eliciting the stress response, increase people susceptibility to diseases such as hypertension, stroke, peptic ulcer, diabetes and so, stressful situations can also impair health indirectly by eliciting responses such as smoking, drinking, over-eating or drug abuse, all of which have harmful effects. Mary and Carlson (2001) opined that stress response is useful in the short run, but can have after effects that are deleterious to one's health. Many scholars have noticed that in modern society, some people are stressed continuously and thus are subjected to the harmful long term effects of the flight or fight response.

However, it would be a dull life if there were no challenges in it. Indeed, there is some evidence that having no challenges at work is more stressful than the presence of challenges that stretch us to a degree. But the idea that we "need stress" in our lives is obviously capable of exploitation (Cooper, 1997). Thus, a balance between stimulation and rest is required and common experience suggests that our ability to respond to challenges is limited. One can be overstretched and loose function or operate with his tolerances and function effectively. This means that, one should consider whether stressors are bad or good by asking if people are working within their tolerance and if they have adequate "recovery time." Moreover it is pertinent to acknowledge the fact that individuals depending on the current context of their working life, have different tolerances, or susceptibilities to stress and different sizes of their resilience. This can depend partly on the amount of support they get from personal and work relationships the work demands and factors such as their health status and the interest and meaning in their jobs (Karaseka and Theorell (1990).

Resilience is dynamic, it could be lesser or greater, depending on the individuals life experiences and their inevitable difficulties. Shever and Taupy (1998) concluded that an exciting challenge to one person may be a daunting test to another and a repetitive job might be viewed by some as boring and monotonous, but others may like and feel, particularly comfortable with this type of routine. This study is based on the premise that there are predisposing factors of stress, a phenomenon afflicting workers of all cadres.

### **Purpose of the Study**

The main purpose of the study is to investigate how stress coping mechanisms and work output of junior staff could affect the administrative directorate of State Secondary Education Board of Uyo.

Specifically, the study sets out to:

1. examine the impact of stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance of the junior staff in the administrative directorate of Secondary Education Board of Uyo;
2. determine the influence of work output of the junior staff in the administrative Directorate of Secondary Education Board of Uyo;
3. ascertain the effects of stress coping mechanisms and work output of junior staff in the administrative directorate of State Secondary Education Board, Uyo.

### **Statement of Hypotheses**

Based on the objectives of this study, the hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 alpha level.

1. There will be no significant difference in the stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance of the participants and the work output in the administrative directorate of Secondary Education Board, Uyo.
2. There will be no significant difference in the work output seeking information behaviour of the participants and work output intervention in the administrative directorate.
3. There will be no significant difference in the attitude of the participants and work output planning course techniques in the administrative directorate of Secondary Education Board, Uyo.

### **Design of the Study**

The researchers utilized an ex-post factor design. The design was considered appropriate because of its initial capacity to take care of the initial differences among the participants. Besides, the variables under study had already occurred and cannot be manipulated.

### **Area of Study**

The research area for this study is Administrative Directorate of the State Secondary Education Board in Uyo Metropolis of Akwa Ibom State.

#### **Population of the Study**

The population of the study comprised all the junior staff of the administrative directorate of the State Secondary Education Board, Uyo. The directorate has a total population of one thousand and fifty-nine junior staff (SSEB, Statistics Section 2007).

### **Sample and Sampling Techniques**

A sample of 180 participants was involved in the study. The participants were randomly drawn from all the sectors of the administrative Directorate of the State Secondary Education Board, Uyo. Both sexes were equally represented in the study. Each of the three sectors of the junior staff (clerical, messengers and cleaners) has a sample size of sixty (60) participants, thirty (30) males and 30 females respectively. The participants were old and new junior staff.

### **Instrument for Data Collection**

The influence of stress and coping mechanisms questionnaire (ISCMQ) with 25 items was constructed and used for collecting data. The items measured effects of stress and coping mechanisms on work output of junior staff in the Administrative Directorate of the Board. The need for work output information and need for self-knowledge on coping mechanisms which represent information factors were utilized for the study. Typical items on the subscales are

- (1) Before choosing or entering a particular career area, "I still need to talk to people in one or more various occupations."
- (2) Before choosing or entering a particular career area I still need to attempt to answer who am I." The response format of the scale ranges from strongly agree or strongly

disagree. The two subscales have a total of eleven items each. Those whose instrument has a test re-test reliability values ranging between 0.79 and 0.84 and a Cronbatch alpha index of between 0.73 and 0.86. The internal consistency for the total inventory was .87.

The Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (SJPQ) was also used to obtain information on work output of the staff in the directorate Board.

### **Staff Job Performance Questionnaire (SJPQ)**

The instrument was also structured on a 4-point Likert scale of Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) with numeration value of 4,3,2 and 1 respectively. The instrument had 10 items and was responded to by the 180 junior staff in the administrative directorate of Secondary Education Board. Questions were asked on staff participation in extra-curricular activities, staff punctuality to work and regularity at the office, effective and accurate records keeping and staff assistance in the maintenance of discipline in the office. All participants were requested to indicate the extent of their agreement and disagreement by ticking (✓) the items on the questionnaire.

### **Reliability of the Instrument**

Seventy-five people who did not participate in the study were used for the test re-test reliability. The influence of stress and coping mechanisms questionnaire (ISCMQ) and staff job performance questionnaire (SJPQ) copies were distributed to the seventy-five participants who were never original partakers in the study. After a three weeks interval, the same group of people was given the same questionnaire again. The Kuder Richardson (KR-21) approach was used in obtaining the value of 0.75 which indicated that the instrument was reliable.

### **Data Analysis**

The data collected from the Administrative Directorate of the State Secondary Education Board were subjected to t-test and analysis of covariance (ANCOVA) statistical analysis in order to specifically test the hypotheses formulated for the study.

## **Results**

### **Hypothesis 1**

There will be no significant difference in the stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance of the participants and the work output.

**Table 1: Analysis of Covariance on Stress Coping Mechanisms and Staff Job Performance on Information Seeking Behaviour**

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean	F	D
Stress coping Mechanisms and staff job performance on information seeking behaviour	Row	742.94	2	371.47	1225.42	<.05
	Columns	18.71	2	9.35	30.86	<.05
	Interaction	5.87	4	1.47	4.85	<.05
	Within	1036.73	171	.303		

As indicated in Table 1, the analysis of covariance of participants post-test scores on stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance information seeking behaviour shows that there is significant main effect of treatment ( $F(1, 114) = 2443, P < 0.05$ ). Consequently, the null hypothesis which posited that there will be no significant difference in the stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance seeking behaviour of experimental participants and the control group was rejected. The inference that could be drawn from this result is, that significant difference existed in the stress coping mechanisms and staff job performance information seeking behaviour of treated participants and the control group. It is also noted that there is moderating effect and interaction of treatment with gender and self-efficacy was also significant ( $F(4, 171) = 4.55, P < 0.05$ ).

### **Hypothesis 2**

There is no significant difference in the work output seeking information behaviour of the participants and work output intervention in the administrative directorate.

**Table 2: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) showing the effects of work output seeking information behaviour and work output intervention**

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean	F	D
Work Output	Row	556.11	1	556.11	2443.67	<.05
	Columns	15.81	2	7.91	33.95	<.05
	Interaction	4.38	2	2.19	9.42	<.05
	Within	531.00	114	23		

The result in Table 2 shows that there was significant effect of work output intervention on the work output seeking information behaviour of the participant ( $F(1, 114) = 244.67, P < 0.05$ ). Sequel to this result, it was concluded that work output intervention was superior to control. Furthermore both gender and self-efficacy influence the relationship between the casual variable and the criterion

measure ( $F(2,114) = 33.95, P < 0.05$ ). There was also interaction effects of rows and columns ( $F(2,114) = 19.42, P < 0.05$ ).

**Hypothesis 3**

There will be no significant difference in the attitude of the participants and work output planning course techniques.

**Table 3: Analysis of Covariance (ANCOVA) showing the effects of work output planning course techniques on participants work output information seeking behaviour**

Variable	Source	Sum of Squares	DF	Mean	F	D
Work Output	Row	543.10	1	543.10	2060.93	<.05
	Columns	6.71	2	3.35	12.74	<.05
	Interaction	4.28	2	2.15	8.13	<.05
	Within	600.83	114	.26		

Hypothesis 3 revealed that there was significant difference in the work output seeking information behaviour scores of participants exposed to work output planning course techniques and the control group ( $F(2,114) = 2060.93, P < 0.05$ ). This shows that work output planning course techniques, was effective in fostering work output information seeking behaviour of the participants. Again, gender and staff job performance moderate the relationship between the treatment and the criterion measure ( $F(2,114) = 12.74, P < 0.05$ ). There was also significant interaction effect of treatment and columns ( $F(2,114) = 8.131, P < 0.05$ ).

**Table 4: Multiple Classification Analysis (MCA) of Work Output Information-Seeking Behaviour Scores by Levels, Treatment and Gender**

**Grand Mean = 28.49**

Variable +Category	N	Unadjusted Deviation	ETA	Adjusted for Covariance Deviation	BETA
LEVELS					
1. CEO	60	5.71		4.22	
2. MER	60	.54		.48	
3. CLR	60	-6.36	.46	-4.70	
TREATMENT					
1. SCM	60	6.44		6.52	

2. WOT	60	6.43		6.34	
3. CONTROL	60	-12.87	.84	-12.86	.84
GENDER					
1. Male	90	2.08	19	1.68	16
2. Female	90	-2.08		-1.68	
Multiple R <sup>2</sup>					.959
Multiple R					.979

Table 4 shows that Multiple Classification (MCA) of the adjusted independent variable plus the covariate. The adjusted deviation value of 6.52 is an indication of the effectiveness of work output intervention in enhancing coping mechanisms of the participants. Work output intervention demonstrated superiority over work output planning course techniques and control groups with adjusted deviation values of 6.34 and -12.86 respectively. Nonetheless, work output planning course techniques were effective in fostering work output information seeking behaviour of the participants when compared with the control group. The MCA also indicates that there was high degree of correlation between work output information seeking behaviour and the treatments as evident by the Multiple R<sup>2</sup> value of .959. By implication 95.9% of the variance of the criterion variable (work output information seeking behaviour) is attributable to work output exploration intervention and work output planning course techniques.

**Table 5: Duncan Multiple Range Comparison of Treatment groups Means Score on Work Output Information Seeking Behaviour**

Mean	Group	Treatment Group		
		CONTROL	SCM	WOT
22.1333	Control	*	*	
29.1333	SCM			
34.2000	WOT		*	

**Key:** \*Pairs of Groups Significantly Different at P<0.05.

Duncan Post-hoc analysis procedures were further carried out on the result in order to find out where the significant effect lies. The result presented on Table 5 shows that the experimental group 1 (SCM) is significantly different from experimental group 2 (WOT). While experimental 2 (WOT) is statistically different from experimental group 3 (Control). Therefore, the SCM group is superior to both WOT and Control groups. Likewise, SCM group is superior to Control Group, that is, SCM >WOT>Control Group on the work output information seeking behaviour mean scores.

### **Discussion**

The participants in the treatments groups scored significantly higher on measure of work output information seeking behaviour than their counterpart in the control group. Both SCM and WOT were effective in enhancing the participants coping mechanisms information seeking behaviour. This finding corroborates the assertion of Cohen and Williamson (1990) that work output exploration

has a positive impact on the decision-making process in job search placement and on occupational placement and attainment. It also occurs with that of Rice (1998) who posited that coping mechanism predict the competence to generate work options and that it is significant predictor of work or career decision-making.

One possible explanation for the effectiveness of SCM in improving work output information seeking behaviour of junior staff is that it exposed them to various avenues through which they could seek stress coping mechanisms information. Also the method widens their knowledge and has gone a long way to removing the veil of ignorance of the participants.

The effectiveness of WOT could be attributed to the fact that it was presented as another interesting scope which is characterized by good instructor interaction where all the participants are free to express their opinion had their misconceptions corrected and new information was given to widen their knowledge about what work output planning is all about. The effectiveness of WOT in enhancing coping mechanisms information seeking behaviour was supported by the study of Harma (2001) who discovered that highly experienced workers have focus of what their duty is.

In the second hypothesis, the result indicates clearly that there existed significant difference in the stress coping mechanisms information seeking behaviour of SCM participants and the control group. This result attested to the effectiveness of the treatment programme. The finding is in line with the previous studies of Cox (1998), Harman (2002) Okoro (2002) and Charles (1990) that concluded that vocational exploration produces favourable result in terms of career development, mainly when individuals explore significant and useful information in relation to their proximal career development task. This finding is also in agreement with Shever and Tarpy (1998) who asserted that stress coping mechanisms have significant impacts on work output maturity and self-concept crystallization. They further explained that stress coping mechanism exploration has an impact on the decision-making process, in job search and placement and work satisfaction and attainment. It would have been a great surprise had the control participants performed better than those participants treated with SCM since it had been confirmed in the first hypothesis that the two treatment strategies were superior to control group. However the low performance of the control participants was due to the fact that they were not exposed to any treatment.

The third hypothesis further proved that there was a significant difference in the attitude information seeking behaviour of the participants exposed to WOT when compared to those in the control group. The significant difference is rooted in the fact that the treated participants were exposed to a comprehensive WOT treatment programme. The control on the other hand was not exposed to my form of treatment. The finding corroborates the assertion of Everly and Mitchell (2000), Karasek and Theorell (1980) who posited that attitude training programme could be effective to broaden occupational outlook as well as improving the vocational maturity of the workers.

One other important aspect of the present study is the moderating influence of stress coping mechanisms self-efficacy and gender on the casual link between the intervention programmes and the criterion measures. In making stress coping mechanisms decision series of tasks are involved and the appropriateness of such decision would to a large extent be influenced by the extent to which an individual believes in him/herself, to execute relevant work or assignment task. This explanation probably holds for participants in the study. The interaction effect of gender on the treatment outcome is a validation of the general notion that gender plays a crucial role in work output



information seeking behaviour. The present finding is therefore an affirmation of the influence of gender on work output behaviour.

### **Educational and Career Counselling Implications**

The findings have multifaceted implications. It is evident from the results that SCM and WOT were quite effective in enhancing work output information seeking behaviour of junior staff, in Administrative Directorate of Secondary Education Board. This study therefore has some implications for counseling psychologists, teachers, Educational Administrators, Education policy-makers, parents and the government.

The SCM and WOT techniques developed in the study could be used to improve attitude to work of the junior staff. It is obvious from literature reviewed that these two treatment methods have been used separately in different situations and occasions to enhance workers positive attitude in seeking for work output information through numerous avenues as well as getting right information and know that would equip them to make appropriate working decision. The implication therefore is that counselling psychologists and career vocational guidance counselor should familiarize themselves with these two techniques whose efficacy has been tested experimentally and empirically validated. The curriculum planners, educational administrators and policy-makers should fully integrate the two techniques into secondary school curriculum either as a subject or major topics in the existing subjects because looking critically at the secondary school curriculum, there is no subject dealing with issue of occupational information neither career education of the adolescents.

For proper implementation of SCM and WOT career counselor and teachers should consider the duration of the training not to be too long to avoid boredom and at the same time not to be short so that some essential points would not be omitted or hastily taught. Each of the techniques should be taught step by step and each training session should be loaded and vital points thoroughly explained.

It is good for school counselling psychologist to develop intervention programmes to enhance work output decision-making and self-efficacy of the students. A viable career counseling programme can ill-afford to ignore the role of self-efficacy in career development process. Counselling psychologists would therefore need to be gender sensitive in the course of performing their professional duties.

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