# SEX, MARITAL STATUS AND YEARS OF EXPERIENCE AS CORRELATES OF STRESS AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA

**Omoniyi,Mary Banke Iyabo PhD**

Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria


**Ongunsanmi, Joyce Olufunke, PhD**

University of Ado  Ekiti, Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria

**Abstract**

This study investigated the level of perceived stress among Nigeria University Academic Staff in the South West based on the variables of sex, marital status, and years of experience as lecturers. The 364 subjects (223 males and 141 females) were selected from eight (8) universities (three (3) federal, three (3) state and 2 private). The stratified random sampling technique was adopted in selecting the subjects according to the population of lecturers in each university. The survey research design was adopted. A self Report perceived stress Assessment Questionare (SRPSAQ) constructed by the researchers was used to elicit information from the respondents. The instrument was made up of two (2) sections a and B. Section A consists of items based on the lecturers' bio-data while section B contained various stress precipitating items to which subjects were to either strongly agree (4), agree (3), disagree(2) or strongly disagree (1). The face and content validities of the instrument were ensured while it's reliability was ascertained through a test-re-test method with a reliability coefficient of 0.86. Three (3) null hypotheses were raised to guide the study.  The data collected were subjected to appropriate descriptive (means and standard deviation) and in inferential (t-test) statistics. The result indicated that there is no significant difference in the level of stress perceived by male and female lecturers irrespective of their years of experience as

lecturers. The findings, also revealed that there is no significant difference in the level of perceived stress by married and divorced lecturers. However there is a significant difference between the level of stress perceived by married and single lecturers. The findings were discussed and counseling implications were made for possible options to reduce stress among academics in the south west.

**Introduction**

Stress seems to have become a popular concept for explaining a wide range of behaviours that appear to defy explanation. Indeed it has become fashionable in the Nigerian society to attribute any erratic or unexplainable behaviour of people to the fact that they are under stress.

In common language, the term 'stress' is associated with distress, meaning any kind of demand, burden, pressure or hardship on the individual. Biologically speaking, stress means anything constituting a threat, either real or imagined which could damage the organism (Staton 2003). Selye (1976) define stress as the rate of wear and tear of the body. Stress is therefore a process in which events or forces threaten the well being of an individual in the society. It is a disruption of the emotional stability of the individual that induces a state of disorganization in personality and behaviour (Anthony, 1984).

Nigeria as a developing country is evidently full of life threatening , harmful and chattering situations, which are stressful to peoples' existence and well-being. Some of these include economic recession and instability, driving on very poorly maintained roads and highways, religious intolerance and insecurity, the menace of armed robbery and political tuggery. The university lecturers as citizens of the country experience all these phenomena along with the professional and personal concerns related to their jobs. These concerns include lack of basic facilities for teaching, learning and research.

The entire Nigerian University communities have not been immuned from the emerging forces of stress in the country. Despite the nation's declaration of the importance of University education in national technological developments and the role it plays in satisfying manpower needs, there seems to be growing evidence that there

are really no private, states or federal university that will genuinely claim to enjoy the basic facilities and resources.

University teaching has traditionally been regarded as a low stress occupation. Although not highly paid, academics have been envied because they enjoyed tenure, light work load, flexibility, 'Perk's such as overseas trips for study/or conference purposes and the freedom to pursue their own research interests. During the past fifteen to twenty years many of these advantages seems to have been eroded in Nigerian Universities. Academic salaries have fallen in real terms in relation to current economic crises. Increasing numbers of academic positions are now untenured; work loads have increased; and academics are under increased pressures to attract external funds for their research and to either 'publish or perish'. These could expose lecturers to such levels of stress that could force them to deviate form normal functioning.

**Statement of the problem**

The Nigeria university lecturers are expected to perform at high level in the area of curriculum without the adequate basic facilities for teaching, learning and research. Though the expectation is commendable, it may not be possible for lecturers to competently manage the diverse needs of students with the resource disabilities presently on ground in south west Nigeria universities without stress.

What is therefore the influence of sex, marital status and years of experience on the level of perceived stress among lecturers in south west Nigeria?

**Methodology**

The Research design employed in this study was the survey type. The design involved a large number of persons and described population characteristics by the selection of an unbiased sample.

The population for this study was all Nigerian university lecturers in the south west. The stratified randomly sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study.

Eight Universities on the whole were used for the study. These consisted of three (3) Federal universities, Three (3) State Universities and Two (2) Private universities. A

total of three hundred and sixty-four (364) Subjects consisting of 233 male and 141 female lecturers were used as sample for the study.

The stratified random sampling method was adopted in selecting the subject. These variables includes sex, marital status and years of experience. The numbers of subjects were selected according to the population of lecturers in the various universities sampled.

A self constructed questionnaire titled Self-Report Perceived Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SRP SAQ) was used to elicit information from the respondents.

The instrument consist of 2 sections A and B.  Section A consist of 10 items requiring information about the lecturers sex, marital status and years of experience. Section B consist of 30 items on various stress inducing factors to which the lecturers were required to indicate by a tick the degree to which these factors induce stress in them. They were requested to 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree', 'Disagree' or 'Strongly disagree' with the items. The responses were scored: Strongly Agree – 4, Agree – 3, Disagree – 2 and Strongly Disagree – 1.

**Validity**

The initial items generated were scrutinized by experts in counseling psychology who made their contributions. The final copy of the items was agreed to have content validity.

**Reliability**

The questionnaire was pilot tested by a test-re-test method using 40 lecturers from one of the state universities who were not part of the sample. A reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained.

**Administration of instrument**

The researchers visited the different universities and were assisted  by one assistant (lecturer) from each of the universities sampled. The questionnaires were handed over to these lecturers who helped to administer them in their own universities.

The questionnaires were collected by these lecturers and mailed back to the researchers. Four hundred questionnaires were administered on the subjects. The exercise lasted for about nine weeks. at the end  of the exercise, 364 questionnaires were returned  giving a rate of 91%.

The responses were analysed using descriptive (means and standard deviation)  and inferential ( t-test)  statistics.

**Purpose of the study**

The purpose of this research work is to contribute to knowledge and provide empirical evidence on the influence  of sex, marital status and years of experience on the level of perceived stress among university lecturers in south west Nigeria.

**Hypothesis**

To guide the thrust of the study the following hypotheses were formulated and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

$Ho_1$

There will be no significant difference between the level of perceived stress among male and female lecturers in south west Nigeria.

$Ho_2$

There will be no significant difference between the marital status of lecturers and the level of stress perceived by them.

$Ho_3$

There will be no significant difference between the level of perceived stress among lecturers and their years of experience.

**Results**

$Ho_1$

There will be no significant difference between the level of perceived stress among male and female lecturers in south west Nigeria.

**Table 1**

T-table showing the level of perceived stress among male and female lecturers in south west Nigeria.

| Variable Sex | N | Mean | Std. dev. | D f | tcal | t-table | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Male | 223 | 98.23 | 12.56 | | | | |
| Female | 141 | 100.34 | 71.35 | 357 | 0.426 | 1.645 | Not Sig. |

P<.05

Table 1 revealed that the calculated t-value (t = 0.426) is lower that the t-table value (t = 1.645). At P<.05 level of significance therefore, the level of perceived stress among male and female lecturers in south west Nigeria is not significantly different. The table also showed a slightly higher means for female lecturers (m = 100.34) as against that of male (m = 98.23).

Ho$_2$

There will be no significant difference between the marital status of lecturers and the level of stress perceived by them.

Table 2

T-table showing the level of perceived stress and the marital status of university lecturers in south west Nigeria.

| Marital status | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Df | Tcal | T-table | Remark |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Married | 276 | 96.78 | 12.84 | 313 | 2.284 | 1.645 | Significance |
| Single | 39 | 115.54 | 133.37 | | | | |
| Married | 276 | 96.78 | 112.84 | 319 | 1.433 | 1.645 | Not sig. |
| Divorced | 45 | 99.78 | 17.57 | | | | |
| Single | 39 | 115.54 | 133.37 | 82 | 0.779 | 1.645 | Not Sig. |
| Divorced | 45 | 99.91 | 17.57 | | | | |

Table II revealed that the calculated t-value for Married and Divorced lecturers (t = 1.433) and single and divorced lecturers (t = 0.779) were lower than the t-table

value (t = 1.645) while the calculated t-value for married and single (t=2.284) is  higher than the t-table value (t=1.645).

It can therefore be deduced that though there is no significant difference between the level of perceived stress among married and divorced lecturers, and between single and divorced lecturers, there is a significant difference among married and single lecturers.

Ho$_3$

There will be no significant difference between the level of perceived stress among lecturers and their years of experience

**Table 3**

T-table showing perceived level of stress and years of experience among lecturers in south west Nigeria.

| Variable Years of experience | N | Mean | Std. Dev. | Df | Tcal | T-table | |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| 0-5 | 78 | 105.51 | 94.83 | | | | |
| 0-10 | 83 | 97.48 | 11.40 | 159 | 0.645 | 1.645 | |
| 11-15 | 96 | 97.49 | 14.88 | | | | |
| 0-5 | 78 | 105.5 | 94.83 | 172 | 0.817 | 1.645 | |
| 16>above | 102 | 97.55 | 13.44 | | | | |
| 0-5 | 78 | 105.5 | 94.83 | 178 | 0.838 | 1.645 | |
| 11-15 | 96 | 97.49 | 14.88 | | | | |
| 16>above | 102 | 97.55 | 13.44 | 196 | 0.301 | 1.645 | |
| 6-10 | 83 | 97.48 | 11.40 | | | | |
| 16>above | 102 | 97.55 | 13.44 | 183 | 0.360 | 1.645 | |

Table 3 revealed that the paired t-test calculation values for the various paired levels of experience (t = 0.766, 0.817, 0.838, 0.301 and 0.360) were all less than the t-table value (t = 1.645) It can be deduced that there is no significant difference in the level of stress perceived by these lecturers irrespective of their years of experience.

However the mean value for lecturers who have between 0-5 years of experience (m = 105.51) was higher than all other categories of lecturers.

The null hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference between the level of stress perceived by lecturers and their years of experience is therefore accepted.

**Discussion**

The study was carried out to determine the level of perceived stress among south west Nigeria university lecturers in relation to variables of sex, marital status, and years of experience.

The findings showed that the level of stress among male and female lecturers in south west Nigeria universities is significantly high (means = 98.23 and 100.34 respectively). This situation of stress among south west Nigeria lecturers supports the findings of  Jarret (2007) who found that psychological strain was higher in academic staff than general staff. Blix (1999), Wiley (2005) and Javis (2002) also asserted that teachers experience significant amount of stress in the course of performing their duties. The study revealed that there is a significant difference in the level of stress perceived by married and single lecturers. The single (mean = 115.4) seems to be experiencing more stress than the married ones (means = 96.78) the observation contradicts the works of Omoniyi, (2007) who found no significant difference between the level of stress perceived by single and married educated working mothers and Meinhe (2008) who observed that the level of stress was not significantly different among married and single university lecturers.

The various findings indicated that lecturers in south west Nigeria are working under high level of stress. This might be due to the inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure coupled with the increased students enrolment.

In real terms of take home pay, lecturers in south west Nigeria seem to earn less than their counterparts in other African countries. There is constant stressful agitation for better conditions of service which usually end up in strikes. When universities reopen, another set of problems emerge; either the semester is extended to make up for the lost ground or the semester is shortened. The lecturers have to cope with the stress of meeting up with time limits set for examinations and compilation of results.

**Conclusion**

The study revealed that lecturers in south west Nigeria are working under high level of stress irrespective to their sex, marital status and years of experience. The situation needs to be addressed urgently so that stress does not become a permanent feature among these Nigeria university lecturers.

**Counseling Implications**

Universities among other institutions, provide the highest training grounds for the requisite human capital for national development. If Nigeria is to achieve her developmental goals therefore, she needs to adopt practices that may help to alleviate stress among university lecturers. It is counseled that the university executives should ensure that lecturers go on annual leave as at when due instead of engaging them in extra part time teaching programmes to generate funds for the institutions. Recreation facilities and social support packages should be boosted up in the university environments.

The Government on their part should look into the inadequate and deteriorating infrastructures. The collapsed municipal services (water, sewage, electric power and waste disposal e.t.c.) should be address with all urgency.

Functional, well equipped counseling centers should be established in all Nigeria Universities in the south west. Here, competent counselors can offer professional services which may alleviate the level of perceived stress. According to Manson (2007) before a situation can be regarded as stressful, the individuals' perception of that situation must be taken into account i.e. appraisal underlie the actual experience of stress. Though the counsellors may not be able to change the external environment of the lecturers, they may be able to change their internal environments (attitudes to situations). This may be achieved through counseling strategies focused on cognitive restructuring and behaviour modifications therapies.

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