

## **Revitalizing the Sources and Effects of Stress among Special Education Teachers in Nigeria**

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### **Abstract**

*This paper examined the concept of stress, sources and effects of stress on special education teachers. Stress is the effect of task demands that a teacher face in the performance of his professional responsibilities. In this paper, special education teachers' stress refers to pressure that teachers face in carrying out their professional responsibilities. Sources of special education teachers' stress such as political, economic, social, environmental, administrative, physiological and psychological as well as effects of stress like physical, emotional, mental and behavioral were discussed. Strategies that can revitalize the special education teachers stress such as promotion and other motivating factors were highlighted. Conclusion and suggestions were offered such as supporting special education teachers to go for in-service training and that ministries of education, principals/ school proprietors should endeavor to mount some workable strategies that may reduce stressors against special education teachers.*

**Keyword:** *Stress, Sources of stress, Effects of stress, Special Education Teachers*

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### **Introduction**

Stress is inevitable, it is part and parcel of our daily life, teachers inclusive. Stress has both positive and negative side, however, most people tend to focus their minds on the negative side. Perhaps, due to the fact that many people die yearly due to stress – related issues. Occupational stress ‘Work Stress’ or ‘Job Stress’ originate from task demands, physical demands, role demands, and interpersonal demands. It is a growing problem that results in substantial cost to individual employees and work organizations all over the world. The changing nature of work place has today placed unprecedented demand on employees, and fuelled concerns about the effect this change has on the wellbeing and health of employees as well as their work organizers. According to Akinade (2007) stress

can be external or internal demands a person regards as harmful, threatening, challenging or taxing. It is also a pressure caused by problems in one's daily life. This can include something that induces in us (like) tension, anxiety, anger, frustration or sadness.

The general concept of Occupational Stress is seen as a response of negative effect, such as anger or depression, by a teacher, usually accompanied by psychological and biological changes (such as increased heart beat) resulting from aspects of teachers job and mediated by perception of the demands made upon the teacher which constitute a threat to his self-esteem (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1978). In the contest of special needs education teachers, Occupational stress according to Reddy (2007) is the "effect of task demands that a teacher face in the performance of his professional roles and responsibilities". The process of teaching is, in itself, quite stressful more especially with regards to the teaching of exceptional students. As a teacher you are responsible not only for imparting knowledge to groups of students, but also for keeping them under control and for teaching them appropriate social behavior. Even, disregarding variations in the student's motivation, past social behavior and prior learning, this would be a challenging task. However, often the student background, lack of motivation and so on make the task of teaching even more stressful (Musa, 2014).

Stress is as explained by Odu & Ayodele (2012:88) that, "It describes a force which affect human beings physically, mentally, socially, emotionally and spiritually. That is the entire body is propelled to react to such force. It is the body's response to any undesirable mental, emotion, social or environmental demand". Stress is widely viewed as referring to the physiological and psychological reaction which occur when individuals meet threats or challenges and the individual perspective, whether consciously or sub-consciously, that is beyond their immediate capacity (David, 2001). On the other hand Akinade (2007: 23) sees stress as any stimulus that either rise your excitement or anxiety beyond what you regard as above your usual or personal capabilities, it is more so, if it is prolonged. It may jolt you to more or better activity or retarded your ability to cope with the event at hand. Stress is summarized to comprise the following salient point: Stress refers to an imbalance in individual body homeostasis resulting from the condition of his environment, social and working. Stress has both positive and negative aspect. Occupational stress is a result of incongruence between the demand of the job and the workers coping ability (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Work stress can lead to anxiety and depression burnout, job alienation, hostility, depression, tension, nervousness, irritability and frustration (Millward, 2005). Acute responses to stress may be in the areas of feelings (for example, anxiety, depression, irritability, and fatigue), behavior (for example, being withdrawn, aggressive, tearful, unmotivated), thinking (for example,

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difficulties of concentration and problem solving) or physical symptoms (for example, palpitations, nausea, headaches). If stress persists, there are changes in neuroendocrine, cardiovascular, autonomic and immunological functioning leading to mental and physical ill health (for example, anxiety, and depression/heart disease). Work stress may negatively affect commitment and productivity (Seaward, 2005).

The level of stress experienced by an individual is mediated by his/her cognitive appraisal of the objective threat, the individual's coping mechanism and personality disposition. The dynamic relationship between personal and organizational factors in the stress cycle is much more complex than the simple goodness of fit between stressors, perceptions, response and consequence (Olusakin & Afoma, 2012: 79). However, this paper refers occupational stress as pressure or task demand that teachers face in carrying out their professional responsibilities.

### **Sources of Special Education Teachers Stress**

Olusakin & Afoma (2012: 80-81) outlined eight sources of stress as follows:

**Political Sources:** The present political state in Nigeria is a major source of stress in the country. The inconsistent policies, with the result of higher level of criminality, insurgency of Boko Haram.... (Niger Delta militants/ revengers as well as area boys in the south) and the recent bombing going on has drastically increased stress in the lives of citizenry. Problems of ethnic, religious and political affiliations further create anxiety and fear which in turn induced stress. High rate of unemployment, quota and contract allocation may be very complex and hard to cope with and they cause stress.

**Economic Sources:** Economic distress is one of the major sources of stress for workers. The high cost of basic items is a great concern to several people and many with large families are finding it increasingly difficult to cope. Salary of many workers were drastically reduced and some ministries, including education/companies down-size their work force there by throwing many back into the job markets. Industrial action embark by workers for nonpayment of their allowances have increased stress in many teacher's/worker's lives. Some people in order to make ends meet have resorted to working for extra hours there by endangering their health. The serious economic difficulties coupled with high rate of inflation, underemployment, job insecurity and unsatisfactory conditions of service induce stress to teachers.

**Social Sources:** Some people/teachers who have poor interpersonal skill worry about attending social gatherings. Others because they want to belong to a certain class in the society have brought upon themselves a great deal of stress. Fulfilling

certain obligations in life like marriage, wedding, child naming have added burden on their social life. These phenomena often pushed teachers into untold stressful life.

**Environmental Sources:** Environmental hazard such as dangerous flaring of gases in the Niger Delta, noisy churches or mosque, religious worship, pollution of water by spillage of crude oils reducing proceeds for fishing and other domestic activities. Flooding and subsequent destruction of houses and roads, farm lands and agricultural products for consumption increases stress. Others are fire outbreaks in farms, residential and commercial houses/schools or classes. Climate change and its attended health challenges are all stressors special education teachers.

**Family Sources:** The family has its own share of stressful events, stressful life event of men involve more challenges and of greater magnitude than those of women due to the nature of men's jobs involving decisions and higher risks. The fact that women are often dependent upon men for economic support and their sense of the personal worth is also indicator of the stressful life events of men/teachers. House-hold chores couple with child-bearing and rearing are stressors to the mind and body of the modern women/teachers. Emotional barrenness in some homes is a great source of stress for several individuals.

**Administrative Sources:** Administrative work entails a lot of stressful activities. These include numerous and often long meetings, heavy or low work load, either physical or mental work is a source of stress. The fact that an administrator/principals has to take responsibility for success or failure of the organization is a potential source of stress. Sometimes administrators/principals have the task of deciding on the promotion, punishment and demotion of staff/teachers under them. Many of these decisions are difficult to make at times because they involve human beings and there are always a possible reactions from staff so punished.

**Physiological Sources:** Malfunctioning of some body system such as the endocrine, nervous or muscular systems can lead to stress. The increased functions of the body as a result of the mass sympathetic discharge gives the impression that stress is stimulus for greater performance but when the increased activity becomes too much (too much work/teaching without adequate rest) for the body to cope with, the body yield demand on it by physical activity. Sedentary life style also add stress on our body because it reduces the pumping efficiency of the heart, apart from over tasking some parts of the body including the brain, wrist, eyes and possibly of the heart decreases. Much brain work or too much physical activity does not help but can cause stress.

**Psychological Sources:** According to Denga (2004), stress may cause from psychological state such as anxiety, depression, compulsive competition, ingratitude, negative self-evaluation, unrealistic goals, and aggression and when these trap a person/teacher he/she may experience stress. Other psychological

stressors are incidence of death of spouse, relation or beloved one, like plane crash which may result to lose of life leading Some children to become orphans, some men widowers, women widows and some become childless all these could cause stress.

Thus, sources of stress are many and varied. Insel & Roth (2002) also opine that job-related stressors include, tight schedules and overtime contribute to time related pressures, worries about job performance, salary and job security are a source of stress for some people (special education teachers). Stress may occur as a result of physical appearance where girls tend to be upset easily because they assume part(s) of their natural body build up, is unfit. Inter personal relationship with the opposite sex also serve as a source of stress to both male and female teachers.

Bonke (2012: 15-16) grouped the major sources of vocational stress under seven main headings:

Factor intrinsic to the job. These factors including job description, working conditions and over load.

Role in the organization: stress may set in if there is role ambiguity that is, if there is lack of clarity about the work objectives associated with the role, about colleague's expectation of the work role and about the scope and responsibility of the job.

Relationship at work: relationship at work has to do with the nature of relationship with one's boos, colleagues, and subordinates.

Career development: two major clusters of potential stressors can be identified in this area. They are lack of job security which result to fear of redundancy, obsolescence or early retirement and status incongruity which result from under-promotion and frustration at having reached one's career ceiling.

Organizational climate and structure: this simply means the threat to individuals. Freedom, autonomy, and identity at workplace or school.

Extra- organizational source of stress: these sources include family problems, life crises, financial difficulties, and conflict of personal beliefs with those of the organization.

Characteristics of individual: sources of pressure at work evoke different reactions from different people. Some people are better able to cope with these stressors than others. They adapt their behaviors in a way that meet the environmental challenge. On the other hand, some personality types have been found to be more disposed to stress.

In fact, an individual or special education teacher can be a source of stress to him / herself like unrealistic expectation in terms of a person being anxious of

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promotion to get to the higher ladder or get rich quick syndrome or being envy with others progress in the work place or school.

### **Causes of Stress among Special Education Teachers**

Stress is caused by pressures. Egbule (2002: 138) as cited by Ladan (2015:34), identified causes of stress as follows:

Workload, Academic work, Pain accident, Loss of job, Divorce, Marital separation, Change to a new school or job, Trouble with in-law, Relationship problem and Sexual problems. These problems may no doubt cause stress to special education teachers' couple with over-crowded class as well as difficulty in controlling the special need education students

### **Effect of Occupational Stress on Special Education Teachers**

Occupational stress has some effect on special education teachers, Bonke (2012: 117). Listed the following effects of occupational stress:

**Physical Effects:** The physical effect of occupational stress like any other forms of stress include menstrual problems, headache, tense muscles, butter flies in the stomach, general aches and pains, constipation, wind, diarrhea, acne, cold hands and feet.

**Emotional Effects:** The emotional effects of stress include anxiety, upset feeling, insecure, negative, frustration, withdrawal, worrying about people think about one, worrying about little and stupid hinges.

**Mental Effects:** The mental effects include thorough blocks, lack of concentration, procrastination, difficulties in decision-making, doubting self, shutting out thoughts, lack of objectivity, not being able to see another's point of view, missing the point, and being frightened.

**Behavioral Effects:** The behavioral effect of stress are being critical of others, getting involved in argument, being unreasonable inertia, insensitivity to others, putting up through less actions, slow reaction to danger, talking excessively, drinking, and smoking. Stress also can lead to low productivity at work place, absenteeism and coming work late, consequently it leads to loss of capital. On the general note vocational stress has effects or impacts on individual's psychological wellbeing, physicians and psychologists confirmed that vocational stress can lead to any abnormality. These effects may force the special education teachers to behave abnormally in the school, classroom and even at home, which may seriously affect his/ her teaching job.

To revitalize the sources and effects of stress on special education teachers, they need to be motivated to perform their job effectively. The more they are rewarded, the harder they would work and the more they would overcome stress. Nwanko (1982) posited that teachers' job satisfaction can be achieved through enhancing the feelings of teachers' achievement by recognizing and rewarding excellence; involving teachers in decision making and leadership; providing healthy social climate in the school and improving teachers personal outlook; making the work challenging and interesting to teachers by way of assigning responsibilities for special function to teachers and ensuring adequate authority for carrying them out as well as promoting teachers' personal and professional advancement through recognition of the role played by the (special) teacher. Other factors that might revitalize special education teachers' stress include good and regular payment of salary, effective supervision and good condition of service.

### **Conclusion**

It is important to understand that all sources and effects of stress that affect the general education teachers also affect the special education teachers with additional peculiarity to him or her. For example, too much shortage of special education teachers coupled with over-crowded classes which interfere with individualize teaching as a recommended method of teaching special need students. Controlling special students is more difficult due to their disability which tend to make them psychologically unstable and difficult to manage. Equipment and teaching materials are too expensive and can hardly be provided under the present economic recession. These stressors seem to be peculiar to special education teachers.

### **Suggestions**

Below are three suggestions for revitalizing sources and effects of stress

Ministries of education, principals/school proprietors should endeavor to mount some workable strategies that may reduce stressors against special education teachers.

The few special education teachers should be supported to go for in-service training.

More special schools with enough classes as well as more special education teachers should be employed.

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