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**Stress, Gender and Coping Strategies among
Secondary School Teachers in Kampala District**

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Abstract

Purpose: The study aimed at assessing the sources of stress among male and female teachers, coping strategies adopted by the teachers and the effects of stress on the job performance of teachers.

Methodology: The study adopted a survey design with both quantitative and qualitative methods. The study was conducted among secondary school teachers who were picked from both private and government aided schools in Nakawa Division, Kampala District. The sample consisted of 100 teachers who were selected through stratified random sampling that comprised of 50 male and 50 female teachers. Stress among teachers was assessed using a stress scale questionnaire and the coping strategies were assessed using the coping questionnaire developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) and open ended questionnaire was used to assess the effects of stress on the performance of teachers. Quantitative data was coded on themes derived from the objectives of the study. Quantitative data was analyzed using factor analysis, t-test and correlation analysis.

Findings: The major sources of stress in terms of factors were work-oriented, personal failure factors and poor working habits factors. In case of coping strategies for social support seeking coping strategy, the main strategy used was “accepted since nothing could be done” and e least used was “avoided stressful work”. Emotional focused coping strategy had “prayed or got involved in other spiritual activities” as main strategy used while “I brought the risk to myself” was the least used strategy. And “kept myself from thinking too much about stress” was main strategy used while “gone on as if nothing had happened” was least used by the teachers in coping with stress. There was a negative relationship between all the three factors of stress indicating that whenever one was stressed, then their performance was negatively affected.

Key Words: *Stress, Coping Mechanisms, Performance, Teachers*

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Background

Stress is a term that has been documented in the fields of education, social sciences and health and how it affects people's lives across many professionals. Research has been done on stress and its effects on performance of multi-disciplines. Most teachers in the Ugandan educational system are faced with a lot of pressure which are social, political, domestic, economic or academic. All these pressures put a lot of psychological stress in the teachers during performance of their duties of teaching and instruction of their students.

In the school setting male and female teachers are affected differently by the many forms of stress which eventually affect their output in the form of performance. The performance of other school related activities such as extra-curricular activities that lead to the proper growth of the students. According to Davidson et al. (1995) individuals experience stress when they perceive a situation or an event as being in some way potentially harmful, threatening, and unpleasant or over whelming to their adaptive capacity. In support of this teachers have many threatening and overwhelming events which interfere with their work at school.

Coping is the process by which people try to manage the perceived discrepancy between the demands and resources they appraise in a stressful situation (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). There are many ways of coping with stress. These can be broadly categorized as problem focused and emotion focused coping. Problem focused coping tries to remove the stressor completely whereas emotion focused coping tries to deal with the emotions caused by the stressor without removing the stressor. Stress coping strategies are very important if stress has to be managed so as to improve the mental health of those who remain in the teaching job. In developing countries like Uganda little effort has been done on stress coping strategies, yet stress is increasing in all sectors of employment including the teaching profession.

Research on coping with stress has taken different directions in different settings. According to Fieldden and Cooper (2002) all the studies point to two major ways of coping with stress emotion. Focused coping with includes cognitive efforts that change the meaning of the situation without changing the environment and problem – focused coping with includes efforts aimed at eliminating the stressor.

Indicators of stress in teachers may involve behaviors such as frequent smoking, too much drinking, anger subjected to students unnecessarily while indicators of performance that is affected by stress could involve absenteeism of teachers, poor working relationships with fellow teachers, school administrators, low productivity in work load in terms of teaching and may be turnover cases. Stress can be taken to be detrimental or profitable in some cases but detrimental stress needs coping strategies among teachers so that it does not cause negative effects in the performance of their duties. Eustress which leads to improved performance may not require coping strategy.

Morgan (1986) studies stress as coping strategies among executive technocrats and collected data to examine whether there was any difference in coping strategies of male and female technocrats on Role Projective instrument for coping styles. A sample of 100, 60 males and 40 females were

used. The results indicated that there was a significant difference observed in the coping styles of male and female technocrats. While men used a defensive style more often than women, females largely used approach style for coping.

Women's participation in the workforce in the past few decades has captured the attention of organizational scholars and practitioners. Associated with this is the increased interest among researchers on the topic of gender differences in various organizational behaviour topics such as motivation, career achievement, vocational choices and job satisfaction. Some research has also been conducted in the area of gender differences in occupational stress (Baruch, et al, 1987). Stress is defined as any condition or characteristic of the work environment which threatens the individual's psychological and physiological homeostasis (Firth-Cozens, 2003). Previous studies have shown that work stress has deleterious consequences on individual health and safety (Rees, 1995). Costs associated with occupational stress in terms of work days lost, absenteeism and health costs have significant implications for organizations (Fielden, & Cooper, 2002). Hence, because of the potential negative consequences of stress and the increasing number of women in the workforce, research on gender differences in occupational stress has become a topic in significance to both individuals and organizations.

In Uganda, teachers of science subjects are always referred to as very good by their students, fellow teachers, administrators and the community around them. Teachers in schools are affected in a number of ways. They are influenced by the school environment, the nature of the work they do, family and economic situations all affect them. All these lead to stress among the teachers which in turn affect their job performance leading to poor academic achievement of their students. Some teachers despite of the stressful moments prove to perform extremely well in their jobs. So in Kampala in particular this study is to find out which job conditions around the school are more stressful, the effects of these stressors, and how the teacher can cope with such stress.

Surveys conducted to establish the welfare situation in Makerere University revealed that life of university teachers is worrying and stressful (Byaruhanga, 1997). He also noted that salaries are a real neurotic problem for the academic staff. Furthermore; it asserts that grossly inefficient salaries have been thrown lecturers and functional paralysis and prompted many of them to find a formula for supplementing their incomes and reducing the stress load or pressure (Senteza, 1992). The World Bank survey (1993), further this observation adding that lecturers are forced to look for extra work or moonlight in fields like construction and renovations or decoration work, while other tech in more than one school, or opt for "greener pastures" elsewhere altogether (Nansikombi, 1997). Very little research has been on stress and coping in Africa and especially too little has been done in Uganda and that is why this study is of great necessity in accumulating information on these two concepts.

1.2 Objectives

1. To identify the coping strategies adopted by male and female teachers to manage stress.
2. To assess how gender influences teachers coping strategies to stress.

2.0 Methods

The research used both qualitative and quantitative methods where a survey design was applied and the target population was secondary school teachers who were selected randomly from both private and government owned schools. Stress among teachers was got by the stress questionnaire (Srivivasan, 2003). This kind of questionnaire determined the level of stress among the teachers. The ways of coping questionnaire developed by Folkman and Lazarus (1988) was employed to assess the strategies teachers' use of cope with stress. It comprised of 56 items that were completed by both male and female teachers. A constructed opened ended questionnaire was administered to teachers to assess how stress affects their performance. 20 items were constructed for this purpose. The data was collected from the field, edited and checked for completeness. The complete questionnaires were then be coded.

Qualitative data was coded basing on themes derived from objectives of the study and displayed in summaries in form of frequencies. Verbatim quotations were used in the discussion of the findings.

Quantitatively the data was entered into the computer after editing and coding using the SPSS package. For hypothesis 1, factor analysis was done and stress factors were categorized into three factors and a t-test was done for male and female teachers. In case of hypothesis 2, responses on the ways of coping questionnaire were factor analyzed and a t-test was done for gender. A correlation coefficient was performed for job stress and performance to test hypothesis 3.

3.0 Results

3.1 Gender and coping strategies

In this section, factor analysis was done and the t-tests were run to show the relationship between gender and coping strategies among teachers in Kampala district. The results were analyzed according to three forms of coping strategies that is;

1. Social seeking coping strategies
2. Emotional focused coping strategies
3. Self-controlling seeking strategies

3.2 t-tests for hypothesis

The second hypothesis stated that there's a significant relationship between male and female teachers and their coping strategies. The coping items were factor analyzed and came up with three factors which were t-tested independently.

3.3 t-tests for social support seeking coping strategies

Social support seeking coping strategies were t-tested with gender and the results are shown in the table below.

Table 1: t-test for social support seeking coping strategies

Group statistics

Sex of respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error mean
Social support coping				
Male	50	2.6457	0.55833	0.07896
Female	50	2.5371	0.58159	0.08225

Independent samples test

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Social Support coping					
Equal variances assume	0.127	0.723	0.952	98	0.343
Equal variances not assumed			0.952	97.857	0.343

Table 1 show that male teachers used social support coping less than female teachers. This is shown by the Means (males = 2.6457; female = 2.5371). There is no significant difference in coping strategies in social support seeking coping strategy in males and female teachers. This is shown by the t-test score of (0.952) at a level of significance ($\alpha = 0.343$) which is larger in magnitude than 0.05.

3.4 t-tests for emotional focused coping strategies

Emotional focused coping strategies were t-tested with gender and the results are shown in the below.

Table 2: t-test for emotional focused coping strategies

Group statistics

Sex of respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error mean
Emotional focused				
Male	50	2.4844	0.61220	0.08658
Female	50	2.3514	0.37764	0.05341

Independent samples test

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Emotional focused Equal variances assumed	0.310	0.579	-0.684	98	0.496
Equal variances not assumed			-0.684	97.969	0.496

In emotional focused coping, the table 2 shows that female scope to stress better than males as shown by the mean figures (males = 2.4844; females = 2.5689) but there is no significant difference in the coping strategies employed by both females and males due to the t-test. This is shown by a t-test value, (-0.684) at a level of significance ($\alpha = 0.4996$) which is larger in magnitude than 0.05. So the null hypothesis was rejected.

3.5 t-tests for self-controlling coping strategies

A t-test was used to test the effect of gender on self controlling coping strategy.

Table 3: t-test for self controlling coping strategies

Sex of respondents	N	Mean	Standard Deviation	Standard error mean
Self controlling				
Male	50	2.5114	0.38624	0.05462
Female	50	2.3514	0.37764	0.05341

Independent samples test

	F	Sig.	T	df	Sig(2-tailed)
Self controlling					
Equal variances assumed	0.592	0.444	2.094	98	0.039
Equal variances not assumed			2.094	97.950	0.039

In self controlling coping strategies, it's shown that males cope with stress more than their female counterparts according to the means (males = 2.51; females = 2.35) and there is a significant difference in the coping to stress between male and female teachers. Since the test score of (2.09) at a level of significance ($\alpha = 0.039$) which smaller than 0.05, the null hypothesis was accepted.

4.0 DISCUSSION, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

4.1 Discussion

Ten (10) schools were used in the collection of data whereby in each school, 10 teachers were selected. This shows that 50 teachers were selected from private schools and 50 teachers were selected in government aided schools according to table two. In total 25 students were selected from private and government aided schools.

The majority of respondents (69%) were ordinary teachers without any administrative responsibilities. This still shows that age of a teacher affects their promotions greatly.

The majority of the respondents were single followed by the married ones. This can also be explained by the fact that the majority are below 30 years of age, it shows that they are just mobilizing resources to make their marriages formal and even their level of maturity to handle family affairs could be a bit low hence making them single. Marital status is a variable that has

been found to relate with high levels of stress especially among married women (Firth Cozens, 2003).

The majority of the respondents lie between the age of 20-30 with 76% and the least 41 – 50 with 8%. Studies among nurses indicate that age is not a significant variable as a predictor of stress in Uganda (Baguma, 2001). Hemingway and Smith (1999) found no relationship between stress and age among British nurses. Kirkcaldy, Trimpop and Cooper (1997) found a positive significant relationship between age and stress among medical personnel the age range of the respondents in table six which shows that the majority were actually below 30 years of age and get promotions in schools depend mostly on the age of the teachers.

Managham (1983) found that education is associated with coping hence it influences the nature of coping that a teacher/person would need to control stress. Furthermore, studies among nurses indicate that professional qualifications is not significant variable as a predictor in regression equations in Uganda with more qualified nurses experiencing high stress (Baguma, 2001).

4.1.1 Gender and coping strategy

According to table one, teachers usually try to accept their stress from work since nothing can be done always. Most of them approach schools seeking for jobs and once they get they tend to endure whatever difficulties they face.

And avoiding stress work with ($r = 0.372$) is the lowest coping strategy since everybody tries to get work whether stressed or not unless there is a better alternative.

People tend to pray or get involved in other spiritual activities whenever they are stressed. This is shown in table thirteen. When people get problems/frustrations in our daily lives or at work we tend to turn to our savior to solve our problems. But also teachers would not eventually accept that they brought the risk to themselves since they will use a lot of defensive mechanisms to deny being the causers of such stress.

Usually whenever one is stressed, they try your level best to avoid thinking about it and that is why according to table fourteen, “kept myself from thinking too much about stress” ($r = 0.563$) had the highest correlation while “gone on as if nothing had happened” ($r = 0.315$) had the least value that it is always very hard to pretend as if nothing had happened once you are stressed.

Table three shows that male teacher cope faster to stress than their female counter parts as per social support seeking coping strategies. Among the emotional focused coping strategies in table sixteen, female teachers cope better than males to stress. Females are usually more emotional to anything frustrating and that is why they would use their ability (being emotional) when it comes to stress. Under self controlling strategies, males cope to stress better than female counterparts. This could be due to the fact that males tend to solve their own problems without approaching others for assistance or advice.

4.2 Conclusion

On the basis of findings and discussions, the following conclusions were drawn:

- Male and female teachers have similar sources of stress.

- There is a difference in the coping strategies among male and female teachers. The results show that male teachers cope much better than female teachers to stress in the school environment.
- Job stress affects teachers' performance negatively.

4.3 Recommendations

1. Teachers seem to use a variety of coping strategies depending on the type of stressors. This tendency should continue. There is need however to conduct coping training where teachers are trained how to cope with stress.
2. When designing coping interventions, background factors of the teachers have to be considered.

4.4 Suggestions for further research

It is suggested that further research should investigate coping effectiveness among secondary teachers. The sources of stress covered are mainly school or work oriented. Further research should assess out of school sources of stress among the male and female teachers. Also further research can be done how stress affects school administration such as head teachers and their deputies.

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