Pakistan Journal of Social Sciences 8 (4): 159-165, 2011
ISSN: 1683-8831

Emotional Intelligence, Gender and Occupational Stress among Secondary School Teachers in Ondo State, Nigeria

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Abstract: This study investigated the influence of emotional intelligence and gender on occupational stress among secondary school teachers. Four hypotheses were postulated and tested. An ex-post facto design was used to gather 392 usable copies of the questionnaires from secondary school teachers working in Ondo state. Stratified random sampling technique was used to choose the sample. Two instruments, Emotional intelligence and Occupational stress scales were used to collect data for the study. The t-test analysis at 0.05 level of significance indicated that there was a significant difference between the occupational stress of secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence. There was no significant difference between the occupational stress experienced by male and female secondary school teachers. On the basis of the findings suggestions and recommendations were made on how to reduce occupational stress among teachers.

Key words: Emotional intelligence, occupational stress, teachers, recommendations, t-test, Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

The importance of teachers in a nation building cannot be over emphasized. One cannot discuss the role of education in the national development without giving central attention to teachers as the real agent of development. National development hinges on the contributions of the teachers towards attainment of academic excellence by the students. The major work of teachers is human resources development and no nation can develop above her human resources. The different professionals trained by teachers have their contributions to make to national development. Thus, teachers are very important in the actualization of the school goals and national development. In spite of the central role teachers occupy in the national development, research works (Adeyemo and Ogunyemi, 2005; Dorman, 2003; Van der Linde, 2000) have identified occupational stress as one of the cardinal factors militating against their effective performance in schools.

Stress is an ineffective and unhealthy reaction to change (Akinboye *et al*., 2002). It is the body's response to any undesirable mental, physical, emotional, social or environmental demand (Akinboye *et al*., 2002). Occupational stress is known as stress at work. It occurs when there is discrepancy between the demands of the workplace and that of individual's (Tsutsumi *et al*., 2009). Occupational stress is a serious work hazard which has the power to bring crisis on teachers. In recent time, many studies have examined occupational stress in the teaching profession. Studies have suggested that teachers experience disproportionately high level of stress (Adeyemo and Ogunyemi, 2005; Borg, 1990). Darling-Hammond (2001) reported that 30% of novice teachers exit the profession prior to their 50 years. The major reason given for this exit was the level of occupational stress experienced by the researchers. Increase in workload, a hostile environment, large classes, delay and non-payment of salaries, poor working environment, poor condition of service, parents' insults and assaults and time pressure have been identified as sources of occupational stress (Jack and Punch, 2001).

Many research works (Fako, 2010; Jaiyeoba and Jubril, 2008; Ravichandran and Rajendran, 2007) have examined the causes of stress among teachers but just a few have looked into the influence of emotional intelligence on occupational stress. This is a gap to be filled by the present study.

In the past decade, emotional intelligence has generated an enormous amount of interest both within and outside the field of psychology. Salovey and Mayer (1990) defined emotional intelligence as the ability to monitor one's own and others feelings, to discriminate among them and to use this information to guide one's thinking and actions. Later this definition was refined and broken down into four proposed abilities: Perceiving, using understanding and managing emotions (Mayer and Salovey, 1997).

Perceiving emotions as the first branch of emotional intelligence is the ability to accurately identify emotions in people and objects. It also includes the ability to identify ones emotion. This task asks people to identify the emotion that are conveyed by various pictures and designs. Perceiving emotions may represent the most basic aspect of emotional intelligence as it makes all other processing of emotional information possible.

The second branch of emotional intelligence, using emotion is the ability to harness emotions to facilitate various cognitive activities such as thinking and problem solving. Emotions prioritize thinking by directing attention to important information. Emotional state differentially encourages specific problem-solving approaches such as when happiness facilitates inductive reasoning and creativity.

The third branch of emotional intelligence, understanding and analyzing emotions is the ability to label emotions and recognize relations among the words and the emotions themselves such as the relationship between liking and loving. It is the ability to comprehend emotion language and to appreciate complicated relationships among emotions.

The fourth branch of emotional intelligence, managing emotions is the ability to stay open to feelings, both those that are pleasant and those that are unpleasant. It is also the ability to manage emotion in oneself and others by moderating negative emotions and enhancing pleasant ones, without repressing or exaggerating information they may convey.

There is increasing interest in how emotions affect the way individuals appraise and respond to potentially challenging situations (Slaski and Cartwright, 2002). Slaski and Cartwright (2002) found that managers who scored higher in emotional intelligence suffered less subjective stress, experience better health and well being and that this relationship affected management performance.

Adeyemo and Ogunyemi (2005) examined the interactive and relative effect of emotional intelligence and self-efficacy on occupational stress of university academic staff. Their findings revealed that emotional intelligence contributed significantly to the prediction of occupational stress of the participants. The study of emotional intelligence significantly contributed to occupational stress among employees in Australia. In addition, Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002) reported a negative correlation between emotional intelligence and stress at work indicating that high scorers in emotional intelligence suffered less stress related to occupational environment. Landa *et al.* (2008) found a differential effect of the emotional intelligence on stress.

The ability of employees to properly manage their emotions and manage other employee's emotions will strongly increase their abilities to cope with physiological and psychological stresses in implementing job (Guleryuz *et al.*, 2008; Sy *et al.*, 2006; Thiebaut *et al.*, 2005). Although, this relationship is significant, little is known about the moderating effect of emotional intelligence in occupational stress models (Quoidah and Hansenne, 2009; Kafetsios and Zampetakis, 2008). Many scholars state that the moderating effect of emotional intelligence is less highlighted in previous studies because they have much described characteristics and neglected the role of human emotion in influencing the effect of occupational stress on employee outcomes (Abu-Al-Rub, 2004; Stacciarini and Troccoli, 2004).

Emotional intelligence has also been found to impact on psychological health particularly occupational stress in Europe (Ciarrochi *et al.*, 2001). Ciarrochi *et al.* (2000) posit that emotional intelligence may protect people from stress and lead to better adaptation. They opined that an objective measure of emotional management skill is associated with a tendency to maintain an experimentally inducted positive mood which has obvious implication for preventing stress. Oginska-Bulik (2005) explored the relationship between emotional intelligence and perceived stress in workplace and health related consequences in human service and workers. The result confirmed an essential but not very strong role of emotional intelligent in perceiving occupational stress and preventing employees of human services from negative health outcomes. Oginska-Bulik (2005) concluded that the ability to effectively deal with emotions and emotional information in the workplace assists employees in coping with occupational stress. Therefore, it should be developed in stress management trainings.

Goleman (1998) report that emotional intelligent is twice as important as technical skills and more important than Intelligent Quotient for success in jobs at all levels. It should be however, stressed that studies exploring the relationship between emotional intelligent and experienced job stress and its outcomes are rather scanty. Gardner and Stough (2003) revealed negative relationship between emotional intelligent and occupational stress. Similarly, Duran *et al.* (2004) found a significant relationship between emotional intelligence and burnout syndrome and personnel accomplishment. The data clearly revealed that emotional intelligence may impact on the perceived job stress. Based on the information given above, there are divergent report on the relationship that exists between emotional intelligence and occupational stress.

Thus, the purpose of this study was to examine the influence of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among secondary school teachers in Ondo state. Gender is another variable to be examined in this study. Burke and Richardsen (1991) examined sex differences in level and sources of experienced stress as well as in antecedents and consequences of stress in physicians. Male and female physicians reported similar level of overall stress and similar sources of stress. Similarly, Loosemore and Watersm (2004) found in their study on gender differences in occupational stress among professionals in the construction industry that men experience slightly higher level of stress than women.

Gross *et al*. (1994) found that female and male correlational officers experience similar level of occupation stress. McCarty *et al*. (2007) examine gender differences in occupational stress among officers and found that both male and female officers reported very similar levels of occupational stress and burnout. Lath (2010) conducted a study on the occupational stress among teachers in India. The researchers findings revealed no significant difference in the job stress experienced by male and female teachers.

Lim and Teo (1996) examined gender differences in occupational stress and coping strategies among information technology personnel in Singapore. The results revealed that female IT personnel reported significantly higher scores on sources of stress originating from factors intrinsic to the job, career and achievement, organizational structure and climate and relationship with others. McCarty *et al*. (2007) examined gender differences in occupational stress and burnout among male and female officers. Results indicate that male and female officers reported very similar levels of occupational stress and burnout.

The review of literature above shows that many studies have been carried out on the influence of gender on occupation stress among workers but very few of such studies are available on teachers in Nigeria. This is another gap this study intends to fill.

Hypotheses:

- There is no significant difference in the occupational stress between secondary school teachers with low emotional intelligence and those with high emotional intelligence
- There is no significant difference in the occupational stress between male secondary school teachers with low emotional intelligence and those with high emotional intelligence
- There is no significant difference in occupational stress between female secondary school teachers with low emotional intelligence and those with high emotional intelligence
- There is no significant difference in the occupational stress between male and female secondary school teachers

MATERIALS AND METHODS

Research design: The design for this study was descriptive using the survey type. This enabled the researcher to collect data for the purpose of analysis and generalization.

Sample and sampling technique: A sample of 392 participants (46.43% male and 53.57% female) was chosen for this study. The mean age was 45.3 years and work experience was 15.6 years Proportionate Stratified random sampling technique was used for the selection of sample of the study.

Instrumentation: The emotional intelligence questionnaire developed by Schutte *et al*. (1998) was adopted for the study. The questionnaire consisted of 33 items with the range of responses from 1 (I don't agree at all) to 5 (I completely agree) and scores from 33-165. The higher the score the higher the emotional intelligence. The psychometric properties of the questionnaire are satisfactory. Cronsch's alpha was 0.83-0.87; test re-test was 0.88 for male and 0.81 for female.

Occupation stress scale: The Occupational Stress Scale (OSS) developed by Hassan and Hassan measures a variety of stressful job situations. Participants respond by indicating their level of agreeableness to each of the 60 items statements using a five-point scale ranging from 1 (Never like me) to 5 (Always like me). The OSS has also demonstrated a high internal consistency (Cronbach α ranged from 0.79-0.87). The scale also has a test-retest reliability coefficient of 0.76.

Procedure: The researcher personally administered the emotional intelligence and occupational stress scale. The respondents were given enough time to complete the scales. The instruments were collected from the respondent at their own convenience.

Delimitation of the study: The study was delimited to Akoko South West Local Government Area of Ondo state, Nigeria. About 21 secondary schools were selected for the study.

Data analysis: All the hypotheses were tested using t-test statistical analyses at 0.05 margin error.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: The first hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in occupational stress between secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence. The results obtained from the data analysis regarding occupational stress are shown in Table 1.

As shown in Table 1, the influence of emotional intelligence on occupational stress was found to be significant (Low and High emotional intelligence, $N_1 = 180$, $N_2 = 212$, $\bar{x}_1 = 184.82$, $\bar{x}_2 = 169.90$, df = 390, t = 5.95, $p<0.05$. The hypothesis was rejected because a significant difference in the occupational stress of secondary school teachers based on emotional intelligence was established.

Hypothesis 2: In the second hypothesis, it is stated that there is no significant difference in the occupational stress between male secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence. The results obtained are shown in Table 2.

Table 2 shows the influence of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among male secondary school teachers. Emotional intelligence was found to be significant (low and high emotional intelligence, $N_1 = 82$, $N_2 = 102$, $\bar{x}_1 = 186.77$, $\bar{x}_2 = 166.32$, df = 182, t = 5.96, $p<0.05$). Thus, the hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the occupational stress between male teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence was rejected.

Hypothesis 3: The third hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the occupational stress between female secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence. The results are shown in Table 3.

Table 3 shows that there is a significant difference between the occupational stress experienced by female secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence. This is shown by the calculated t-value of 2.97 which was found to be greater than the table value of 1.96. Thus, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the occupational stress between female teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence was rejected.

Hypothesis 4: The fourth hypothesis states that there is no significant difference in the occupational stress between male and female secondary school teachers. The results obtained from the data analysis are shown in Table 4.

Table 1: The t-test summary of the significant difference in the occupational stress between secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t.cal	t-cri	p
Low emotional intelligence	180	184.82	22.71	-	-	-	-
High emotional intelligence	212	169.90	26.33	390	5.95	1.96	Sig*

*significant at $p<0.05$

Table 2: The t-test summary of the significant difference in the occupational stress between male secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t.cal	t-cri	p
Low emotional intelligence	82	186.77	20.86	-	-	-	-
High emotional intelligence	102	166.32	24.78	182	5.96	1.96	Sig*

*significant at $p<0.05$

Table 3: The t-test summary of the significant difference in the occupational stress experienced female secondary school teachers with low and those with high emotional intelligence

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t.cal	t-cri	p
Low emotional intelligence	100	183.45	23.96	-	-	-	-
High emotional intelligence	108	172.80	27.46	206	2.97	1.96	Sig *

*significant at $p<0.05$

Table 4: The t-test summary of the significant difference in the occupational stress between male and female secondary school teachers

Variables	N	$\bar{x}$	SD	df	t.cal	t-cri	p
Male	182	175.44	25.35	-	-	-	-
Female	210	177.89	26.20	390	0.94	1.96	NS

*Non-significant at $p>0.05$

As shown in Table 4, the influence of gender on occupational stress was found not significant (Male and female, $N_1 = 182$, $N_2 = 210$, $\bar{x}_1 = 175.44$, $\bar{x}_2 = 177.89$, df = 390, t cal = 0.94, $p>0.05$). The hypothesis was not rejected because no significant difference was found in the occupational stress between male and female secondary school teachers. Notwithstanding, the mean scores showed that female teachers experienced more stress than their male counterparts.

This study carefully looked into the influence of emotional intelligence and gender on occupational stress among secondary school teachers. The findings based on the tested hypotheses revealed the following: Occupational stress among secondary school teachers could be determined by emotional intelligence Occupational stress among male secondary school teachers only could be determined by emotional intelligence female teachers' occupational stress could depend on their emotional intelligence and occupational stress was not influenced by gender among secondary school teachers.

The findings of this study revealed the significant influences of emotional intelligence on occupational stress among teachers in secondary schools irrespective of their gender. This has again strengthened previous findings concerning emotional intelligence as a factor influencing occupational stress (Adeyemo and Ogunyemi, 2005; Guleryuz *et al*., 2008; Sy *et al*., 2006; Thiebaut *et al*., 2005; Ciarrochi *et al*., 2000). The relationship that existed between emotional intelligence and occupational stress could be understood from the perspective that teachers with high emotional intelligence are able to monitor their own and others' feelings, discriminate among them and use this information to guide their thinking and actions. They also have the ability to harness emotions to facilitate cognitive activities such as thinking and problem solving. As indicated by Bar-On (2006), emotionally intelligent people are goal oriented and optimistic. These attributes are facilitative of ability to control stress. To further corroborate the result, Slaski and Cartwright (2002) affirmed in their study that managers with high emotional intelligence are less subjective to stress and had better physical and psychological wellbeing. Furthermore, the finding of this study is in agreement with Gardner and Stough (2003) that revealed negative relationship below emotional intelligence and occupational stress.

This study revealed that gender was not a significant factor influencing occupational stress among secondary school teachers. This finding is inconsistent with the finding of Antoniou *et al*. (2006) and Pestonjee (1999) who found significant difference between male and female teachers in the areas of private life, work load and conflict. Female teachers were found to experience more stress than male teachers. Zakiah examined the likelihood of stress among secondary school teachers. The results revealed that gender was not a significant factor predicting occupational stress among teachers. Burke and Richardsen (1991) examined sex differences in level and sources of experienced stress. The result showed a similar level of overall stress between male and female physicians. The results of the present study confirmed the findings of Burke and Richardsen (1991).

Furthermore, the outcomes of this study are consistent with the study of Lath (2010) who found that gender did not significantly influence job stress among teachers. They also agreed with the findings of Abouserie (1996) and Borg *et al*. (1991).

This result is not surprising because the present role of male teachers in secondary school is not different from their female counterparts. Both are subjected to the same teaching condition and there is no gender discrimination. It is generally believed that what a man can do a woman can even do it better.

CONCLUSION

This study explicitly showed that EI was a significant factor influencing occupational stress among secondary school teachers while gender was not. Thus, the ability to effectively deal with emotions and emotional information in schools would assist teachers in managing occupational stress.

If emotional intelligence skills (Empathy, impulse control) are increased in teachers, they would be more effective in handling their feelings and hence directly reduce the level of stress in them. This could indirectly protect their health and psychological wellbeing. Thus, job performance would be enhanced.

The results as found in this study indicated that there is urgent need for the development of intervention programmes aimed at increasing the emotional intelligence level of teachers and better maintain occupational stress. Moreover, emotional intelligence scales should be used as an instrument in the selection and recruitment of secondary school teachers. This could improve the predictive validity of the selection method.

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