

## **Stress adjustment patterns among working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State, Nigeria**

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**Abstract:** *Stress is unavoidable in life, but it depends on individual's perception. This work therefore seek to find out the stress adjustment patterns. Among working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The study adopted descriptive survey designs. Six research questions guided the study and the sample used for the study was 630 working mothers which were sampled from 2,911 working mothers. Questionnaire known as Stress Adjustment Pattern Questionnaire (SAPQ) was used for data collection. Cronbach's Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was employed to estimate internal consistency of the instrument. Thereafter the following values were obtained 0.74, 0.81, 0.82, 0.69, 0.69 and 0.69 this is for the six patterns respectively. Rang of scores was employed to answer the research questions and the result obtained include that majority of working mothers don't make use of appropriate stress adjustment pattern, they are not consistence in the use of stress adjustment pattern while some never made use of stress adjustment pattern. Based on the findings the following recommendation were made. That management of tertiary institutions should regularly organize in-service education programme such as conferences, workshops and seminars to educate working mothers on the right stress adjustment pattern. Also government and management of tertiary institutions should provide recreational facilities in tertiary institutions for working mothers to reduce their tension.*

**Keywords:** *Stress, Adjustment patterns, working mothers, tertiary institutions, Anambra State, Nigeria*

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### **I. Introduction**

Every human being experiences stress in one way or the other. Stress is unavoidable in life, but it depends on the perception of individuals. For many, stress can simply be described as pressure and tension to meet the challenges of life. To some other people it is a condition to strain on somebody's emotion, thought and physical conditions that threaten the individual's ability to cope with the environment. Stress according to Okolocha (2008) is any environmental situation which creates tension and imbalances within or outside an individual's level of productivity. In agreement with this Doublet (2000) in Ukavbe (2009) saw stress as feeling, tension and anxiety or worries. Norment (2002) saw stress as a physio-chemical and emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension and may be a factor in disease causation. However, French (2000) and Akubue (2002) are of the opinion that stress is an adaptive response mediated by individual characteristics, which is an outcome of external actions, situations or event, which place excessive physical and psychological elements on individuals.

Stress affects people in different ways and at different times. Stress comes as a result of a combination of factors in people's personal and working lives. Stress is not weakness but if unnoticed it can lead progressively to decrease in performance, poor health and long term absence from work. Hence D'Arcy (2007) refereed to stress as the body's way of rising to a challenge and preparing to meet, tough situation with focus, strength, stamina and heightened alertness. In same vein, Ofoegbu and Nwadiani (2006), see it as a process in which environmental events or forces threaten the well being of individuals in the society. For the purpose of this study stress is imbalances or tension experienced by individual in an attempt to cope with the challenges of life.

Working mothers are married women who are working in the tertiary institutions. These groups of workers have numerous demands and challenges which they must respond to. They have dual responsibilities of demand from their home and offices, consequently in an attempt to meet up both their dual responsibility, they experience stress. Ukavbe (2009) referring to these demands said that academic staff of the university are faced with numerous challenges and demand, from students and administrative authority to the extent that they are over worked. Apart from the numerous challenges, working mothers face in their offices, they also have additional responsibility which include child care, school run, preparation of food, management of household and other duties as house wives. In attempt to meet these multiple responsibilities, working mothers become exhausted, confused and stressed.

People experienced stress in varying form and degrees everyday. Stress sometimes, is not bad especially when it is moderate, it can actually be beneficial. Stress helps to compel people to action, it can result in a new awareness and exerting new perspective. However, stress can affect individual's physical, mental and social functioning when it is too much

In this case it can be destructive. Obi and Obi (2007) categorized the effect of stress into positive and negative effects. They outlined positive effects of stress on academic staff as follows; stress stimulates academic staff to action, motivates staff to enhance good relationship and enables them to handle future difficulties. They also grouped negative effect of stress into emotional, cognitive and physiological effects.

Stress does not exist on its own, there must be demands that trigger the stress. These demands are called stressors. Stressors are situation which can trigger stress such situations include marking of answer scripts after examination, teaching of large classes, and supervision of projects, dispatching of mails, minuting of mails, meeting up with administrative rules and order, updating knowledge through research, lack of annual leave among other. Domestic stressors include child care, school run, preparation of food and caring for husband among others. Winfield (2000) indicated that there is prevalence of occupational stress among academic and general staff of universities. Olumese (2006) also observed that there are stressors that adversely affect academic staff of universities. Such as supervising students project more than staff can conveniently handle, inadequate facilities such as class rooms, offices, teaching aids marking of examination answer scripts among others. Moreover Fie and Alam (2009) identified stress inducing factors in academic staff to include work overload, homework interference role ambiguity and performance pressure.

Working mothers in tertiary institutions have numerous roles that make them candidates of stress. The home and the office are in a dynamic reciprocal relationship, sometimes stress from the office can be transferred to home or home stress can be brought to the office. This is in accordance with the principle of transferability of stress, stress can result from spillover of fatigue, preoccupation and irritability from work to family and from family to work. Consequently, any minor irrational behaviour from husband, children or dependents result in disproportional hostility. On the other hand, stress generated in the home, say death of spouse, death of children and behaviour of children could also be transferred to work place. This creates a link between the stress in the home and at the work places. Some working mothers have little babies in hand; this adds more stressors because work associated with new born baby is always tedious. Also some young mothers may be pregnant; pregnant women always suffer from pregnancy related illness and at the same time must do their work, both at home and in their offices. Finding by Hashin (2006) pointed out that working mothers are more under stress than non working mothers. Hashin continued by saying that work sometimes puts women into unhappy situation thus making their levels of stress to be high.

The effects of stress sometimes are dangerous making adjustment to stress very necessary in order to reduce its negative effects on the body. The simple, realization that one is in control of his life is the foundation of stress management. Adjustment towards a situation depends on individual's perception about the situation. Individual adaptation to stress differs and their patterns of adjustment differ too. Adjustment according to Omojugba (2008) is an individual's general adaptation to his environment and the demands of life. Adjustment towards stress is all about taking charge of one's thought, emotions, schedules, environment and the way one deals with problems. The ultimate goal is to live a balanced life, creating time for work, relationship, relaxation and capacity to uphold pressure and meet challenges head on. When working mothers in tertiary institution are unable to cope with the stressors, their levels of stress will be high resulting to exhaustion, and negative consequences like depress, low productivity, absenteeism, anxiety, anger, disrupt thinking, mental images, lack of concentration, memory loss, headache, tension and weakness pains and heart disease. Based on numerous unpleasant consequences associated with stress, one could see the reason to identify the stress adjustment pattern working mothers use to cope with their stress.

## **II. Statement of the Problem**

Effect and consequences of stress are prevalent in the health of work force which working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State are not left out. It has numerous effects ranging from poor job performance, mental illness, anxiety, low self esteem, depression, high blood pressure, premature death and headache (Ngoka, 2000). A number of works has been done on stress adjustment strategies to cub stress, among them are George (2001) who reported that the important focus in coping with stress is to feed on balanced diet. Rains (2002) affirmed that relaxation technique can help lessen the discomfort and duration of symptoms of blood pressure. Despite all these work done on stress adjustment strategies the negative effect of stress persists and no study on stress has been done on working mothers Based on this, the researcher decided to embark on the topic stress adjustment pattern used by working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State.

### **III. Purpose of the Study**

The major purpose of this study is to determine empirically the stress adjustment patterns used by working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State to cope with stress. The study identifies;

1. The extent working mothers in tertiary institution in Anambra State adopt to the different stress adjustment patterns.
2. The extent working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt avoidance of unnecessary stress adjustment pattern.
3. The extent working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt situational, alternative stress adjustment pattern.
4. To what extent the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State used adopting to stressors stress adjustment pattern.
5. The extent working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern.
6. The extent working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt fun and relaxation as stress adjustment pattern.

### **IV. Scope of the Study**

The study is limited to working mothers in the five states and federal government owned tertiary institutions in Anambra State namely; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze, federal polytechnic, Oko and Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. The study concentrates on the stress adjustment patterns used by working mothers in tertiary institution.

#### **Research Questions:-**

The following research question guided the study.

1. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt wrong stress adjustment pattern?
2. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt avoidance of unnecessary stress adjustment pattern?
3. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt situation, alternation, stress adjustment pattern?
4. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt to stressors stress adjustment pattern?
5. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern?
6. To what extent do the working mothers in tertiary institutions in Anambra State adopt fun and relaxation as stress adjustment pattern?

### **V. Method**

#### **Research Design**

The researcher adopted descriptive survey research design to collect data from working mothers in the five Federal and State government institutions in Anambra State. According to Nworgu (2006) survey research design is one in which a group of people or item is studied by collecting and analyzing data from only a few people considered to be representative of the entire group. The researcher sees the design suitable because she used a sample of women from the population considered suitable is the representative of the entire population or group.

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

Population use for the study was 2911 working mothers in the five tertiary institutions in Anambra State. The tertiary institutions involved are Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Federal Polytechnic Oko, Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze and Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe. Information obtained from the Personnel Offices of the five institutions in June 2015 shows that there are 1,269 working in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka, Chukwuemeka Odumegwu University Uli, 450 working mothers in Federal Polytechnic, Oko, 406 working mothers in the Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze and 435 working mothers in Nwafor Orizu College of Education, Nsugbe given a total of 2,911 working mothers in the five institutions used for the study.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

The sample size is made up of 630 working mothers sampled from a population of 2,911 working mothers in the five tertiary institutions used for the study. The sample was gotten through proportionate stratified random sampling of the working mothers. The stratification was based on institutions. The details of the sample size are; Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka 137 teaching working mothers and 138 non teaching working mothers. Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University Uli 38 teaching and 88 non-teaching working mothers. Federal Polytechnic Oko, 49 teaching and 48 non-teaching working mothers, Federal College of Education (Technical) Umunze, 44 teaching and 44 non-teaching working mothers and Nwafor Orizu College of Education Nsugbe, 47 teaching working mothers and 47 non-teaching working mothers given a total of 680 working mothers.

**Instrument for Data Collection**

The instrument used for data collection was researcher’s made questionnaire known as Stress Adjustment Pattern Questionnaire (SAPQ). It has 3 point scale of (AU) Always Used 3 point, (SU) Sometimes Used 2 points and Never Used (NU) 1 point. The respondents were requested to choose one of the option provided in the columns to indicate how often they use any of the methods to adjust to stress. The questionnaire was divided into six sections. The first section wrong ways of adjusting or coping with stress which the researcher named “Adjust in your own way”. All the items under this section were scored negatively while the remaining five sections namely; avoid unnecessary stress, after the situation, adopt to the stressor, accept the things you cannot change and make time for fun and relaxation were scores positively.

**Reliability of the Instrument**

Cronbach’s Alpha ( $\alpha$ ) was employed to estimate the internal consistency of the stress Adjustment Pattern Questionnaire. The test items of the instrument were administered to 40 working mothers in Federal College of Education Technical Asaba. The test items were scored pattern by pattern. The internal consistency of each pattern was computed using Cronbach Alpha formular with the following values or results;

- a. Wrong adjustment pattern 0.74
- b. Avoid unnecessary stress 0.81
- c. Alter the situation 0.82
- d. Adapt to the stressor 0.69
- e. Accept things that can’t be changed 0.69
- f. Make time for fun and relaxation 0.69

**Method of Data Analysis**

The researcher employed range of scores to answer the research questions to enhance computation, the options showing the frequency of the usage are as follows; always use (3 points), sometime use (2 points) and never use (1 point). Since the instrument ha six patterns of stress adjustment, they are related as follows;

- 1<sup>st</sup> pattern
  - From 1 – 1.49 which is 10 – 14.90 Never Use
  - 1.5 – 2. 49 which is 15 – 24. 90 Sometimes Use
  - 2.5 – 3.00 which is 25 – 30.00 Always Use
- 2<sup>nd</sup> pattern
  - From 4 – 5.96 which is 40 – 59 . 60 Never Use
  - 6 – 9.96 which is 60 – 99.60 Sometime Use
  - 10 – 12.00 which is 100 – 120.00 Always Use
- 3<sup>rd</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> Pattern
  - From 3.4.47 which is 30 – 44.70 Never Use
  - 4.50 – 7.47 which is 45 – 74.70 Sometime Use
  - 7.50 – 9.00 which is 75 – 90.00 Always Use
- 5<sup>th</sup> and 6<sup>th</sup> Pattern
  - From 5 – 7.45 which is 50 – 74.50 Never Use
  - 7.50 – 12.45 which is 75 – 124.50 Sometime Use
  - 12.50 – 15.00 which is 125 – 150.00 Always Use

**Presentation and Analysis of Data**

Range of scores on how working mothers adopt unhealthy stress adjustment patter

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
10 .00 – 14.00	56	9.30	Never
15.00 – 24.90	355	57	Sometimes

25.00 – 30.00	209	34	Always
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In table 1, it was observed that with scores ranging from 25.00 to 30.00, 209 (34%) working mothers adopt wrong adjustment pattern in managing their stress always 355 (57%) of the working mothers who scored between 15.00 and 24.90 indicated that they adopt it sometimes, while 56 (9.30%) of them who scored 10.00 to 14.90 never adopt it.

Research Question 3: To what extent do the working mothers adopt avoidance of unnecessary stress adjustment pattern?

Table 2: Range of scores on how far working mothers adopt avoidance of unnecessary stress adjustment pattern.

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
4.00 – 5.96	51	8.23	Never
6.00 – 9.96	364	59	Sometimes
10.00 – 12.00	205	33	Always

In table 2, it was indicated that with scores ranging from 10.00 to 12.00, 205 (33%) working mothers adopt avoidance of unnecessary stress as adjustment pattern in managing their stress always, 364 (59%) of the working mothers who scored between 6.00 and 9.96 indicated that they scored 4.00 to 5.96 never adopt it.

Research Question 3: To what extent do the working mothers adopt situation alternation stress adjustment pattern?

Table 3: Range of scores on how far working mothers adopt situation alternation adjustment pattern.

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
3.00 – 4.47			Never
4.50 – 7.47			Sometimes
7.50 – 9.00			Always

In table 3, it was observed that with scores ranging from 7.50 to 9.00, 255 (41.13%) working mothers adopt situation alternation stress adjustment pattern in managing their stress always, 339 (55%) of the working mothers who scored between 4.50 and 7.47 indicated that they adopt it sometimes while 26 (4.19) of them who scored 3.00 to 4.47 never adopt it.

Research Question 4: To what extent do the working mothers adopt adaptation of the stressor stress adjustment pattern?

Table 4: Range of scores on how far working mothers adopt adaptation of stressor stress adjustment pattern.

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
3.00 – 4.47	78	13	Never
4.50 – 7.47	395	64	Sometimes
7.50 – 9.00	147	24	Always

Table 4 reveals that with scores ranging from 7.50 to 9.00, 147 (24%) working mothers adopt adaptation of the stressor stress adjustment pattern in managing their stress always, 395 (64%) of the working mothers who scores between 4.50 and 7.47 indicated that they adopt it sometimes while 78(13%) of them who scored 3.00 to 4.47 never adopt it.

Research Question 5: To what extent do the working mothers adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern.

Table 5: Range of scores on how working mothers adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern.

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
3.00 – 7.45	48	8	Never
7.50 – 12.45	359	58	Sometimes
12.50 – 15.00	213	34.4	Always

Table 5 indicates that with scores ranging from 12.50 to 15.00, 213(34.4%) working mothers adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern always; 359(58%) of the working mothers who scored between 7.50 and 12.45 indicated that they adopt it sometime while 48(8%) of them who scored 5.00 to 7.45 never use it.

Research Question 6: To what extent do the working mothers adopt fun and relaxation as stress adjustment pattern?

Table 6: Range of scores on how far working mothers adopt fun and relaxation stress adjustment pattern.

Range of Scores	N	%	Remark
5.00 – 7.45	36	6	Never
7.50 – 12.45	402	65	Sometimes
12.50 – 15.00	182	29.4	Always

Table 6 shows that with scores ranging from 12.50 to 15.00 182 (29.4%) working mothers adopt acceptance of things that cannot be changed as stress adjustment pattern always, 402 (65%) of the working mothers who scored between 7.50 and 12.45 indicated that they adopt it sometimes while 35 (6%) of them who scored 5.00 to 7.45 never adopt it.

## VI. Discussion of Result

The result as shown in table 2 indicates that most of the working mothers in tertiary institutions 209 working mothers out of 630 working mothers used wrong stress adjustment pattern, while 355 sometimes make use of wrong stress adjustment. Probably, this may be as a result of not being able to differentiate between right and wrong stress adjustment pattern or they were not exposed to the right pattern of stress adjustment. Furthermore, the use of wrong stress adjustment pattern may be as a result of ignorance. This is not in line with the findings of Ukavbe (2008) who reported that academic staff of the universities never use wrong stress adjustment pattern.

Concerning other patterns of stress adjustment, majority of the working mothers always make use of the remaining five adjustment patterns and this is in line with the findings of Okolocha (2008) who confirmed that time management and involvement in social activities are good ways to manage stress. Also this findings agree with that of Maduabum (1994) who found out that sharing ideas with others, having positive thinking towards something and relaxation and leisure are very effective in reducing stress. However some working mothers are not consistent in making use of these five patterns of stress adjustment while some never use it at all. For those who always use them, effort should be made for them to continue. Those that sometimes make use of them are obvious that they are ignorant of the value of the stress adjustment patterns. They are not consistent in managing their stress levels, and should be well informed on the need to reduce their stress levels. They should also be exposed to different patterns of stress adjustment that can be used to reduce stress level.

Those that never use these patterns are more in danger than other groups therefore; their problems should be tackled immediately by guiding them, educating them on to apply those patterns of stress adjustment to reduce stress level. From the information stated, a good number of working mothers in tertiary institutions make use of wrong pattern of stress adjustment pattern, majority of the working mother in tertiary institutions are not consistent in making use of stress adjustment while some never use it at all. This calls for special awareness on the pattern or ways to reduce stress level.

## VII. Conclusion and Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the researcher recommended the following; institutions should regularly organize in service education program such as conference, workshop and seminars to educate working mothers on stress adjustment patterns. This will give working mothers in tertiary institutions, the right pattern of stress adjustment to use. Government and management of tertiary institutions should provide recreational facilities in tertiary institutions for working mothers to reduce their tension.

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