



# **Effect of Stress on Academic Performance of Secondary School Students in Abua/Odual Local Government Area, Rivers State**

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## **ABSTRACT**

This study investigated the effect of stress on academic performance of Secondary School Students in Abua/Odual Local Government Area, Rivers State. The study utilized descriptive survey design. The population consisted of six thousand nine hundred and sixty one (6,961) Secondary School Students. Simple random sampling technique was used to draw a sample of six hundred and ninety six students. “Effect of Stress on Academic Performance Scale” (ESAPS) was used to elicit responses for data analysis. Test-retest method was used to establish reliability coefficient of 0.75. The Z-test statistic was used to test four (4) null hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results: (1) There were significant differences of stress level in male and female study habit in HO<sub>1</sub> through HO<sub>3</sub>. Based on counselling implications, four recommendations were made.

**Keywords:** Stress, Academic Performance, and Secondary School Students.

## **INTRODUCTION**

Stress is one of those constructs in psychology, which we know but find it hard to arrive at a universal acceptable definition. Stress is inextricable interwoven with life and it ceases as life itself stops. All living things – man, plants and animals are in constant state of dynamic interactions with their environment. Within the interactions man tries to modify his environment while his environment modifies him and in the process, man experiences a kind of tension and stress. This western education came along with some discipline, hardship and rigor, all these result to one form of stress or the other which affects the academic performance of the person involved.

Academic manifestation of stress is eminent in lack of concentration, forgetfulness, and inability to think clearly, others according to Denga (1991) include high test anxiety which lowers general performance; speech anxiety occasioned by the need to present papers in class or seminars; compulsive academic competition; physical and mental fatigue occasioned by work demand for instance, farming etc.

Prolonged stress impairs student’s ability to discriminate important information from trivial ones suggested that thinking process and memory are impaired by stress. When we have stress, homeostasis of the body is disturbed and the body reacts by marshaling its resources for self-protection (flight or flee). Studies by Vincent (1990) have shown that prolonged stress leads to death of the brain cells in hypothalamus, which is criterion for factual memory formation. Agulanna and Nwachukwu (2004) posted that protracted stress makes students more susceptible to illness and more sickness means poor health and missed classes which contribute to low examination performance and poor result. When the environment is stressful, it negatively affects pupils’ acquisition of knowledge. Crowded conditions, poor ventilations, abuse and save as in form of teachers and poor teacher negatively affects learning. Stressful threats abound in the life of students (pupils). They could come from teachers and parents inducing the students (pupils) to learn. They could even come from fellow students (pupils). Threats can activate behaviors that are important for survival but not so good for learning. While low level stress or threat can aid in learning high level stress and threat obviously do not. Hence, students should be provided with stress –free academic environment as well as strategic



GSS, Emelego	1774
GSS, Egbolom	333
GSS, Otapha	254
CSS, Emago-Kugbo	326
ECSS, Aminigboko	1535
GCSS, Okpeden South	342
ACSS, Anyu	519
GGSS	236
GCSS, Ogonokom	352
CSS, Okoboh	590
<b>Total</b>	<b>6961</b>

The sample size consisted of 696 representing 10% of the student population. Ten secondary schools were randomly selected, from each secondary school. The choice of SSS111 was considered because of the little maturity of age who can distinguish ideas.

(Source: Planning, Research, And Statistics Department, RSSSSB, Port Harcourt, Rivers State 12/09/2017).

### Instrumentation

The main instrument for data collection is a questionnaire meant to elicit information from the respondents titled, "Effect of Stress on Academic Performance Scale" (ESAPS). The instrument has two sections. Section A contains two main demographic variables while Section B contains 15 question statements marched with the four research questions under a modified 4-point Likert Scale of strongly agree, agree, disagree, and strongly disagree weighted 4,3,2, and 1 respectively.

After constructing the questionnaire the researchers gave it to two experts of Measurement and Evaluation who made useful comments and suggestions that helped the researchers to refine the items. The instrument was subjected to test-retest method which 50 students were involved. The instrument was proved to be reliable at 0.75 probability level which was considered enough and reliable for the study.

### Data Collection

Six hundred and ninety six copies of ESAPS were administered to the students in their schools. The researchers supervised students to complete the questionnaire and waited to collect them. It was observed that it took each respondent between 12- 18 minutes to fill and return instrument. All the 696 copies of questionnaire given were also returned.

### Data Analysis

The data was analyzed using mean scores and standard deviation while the null hypotheses used t-test statistical technique.

## RESULTS

The data and results of the research questions and their corresponding hypotheses are hereby presented in tabular form.

**Research Question 1:** *To what extent does stress influence secondary school students' study habits?*

**Table1: z-test Showing the Level of Significance of stress on study habit of secondary school students in Abua/Odual Based on Gender.**

Stress on Study Habit		Group Statistics					z-cal	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean				
Gender	Male	366	2.64	0.321	0.030	2.116	694	0.035	
	Female	330	2.13	0.112	0.012				

  

Stress on Study Habit	Mean	Paired Differences		95% Confidence Interval of the Difference		z-cal	df	Sig. (2tailed)	
		Std. Deviation	Std. error Mean	Lower	Upper				
Gender	Male	0.35	1.11	0.021	2.132	3.413	2.116	694	0.035
	Female								

From table 1 above, it is observed that the t statistic,  $z = 2.116$  and  $p = 0.035$ ; that is, a very low probability of this result occurring by chance, under the null hypothesis of no difference. The null hypothesis is rejected, since  $p < 0.05$  ( $p = 0.035$ ). There is strong evidence ( $z = 2.116$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ) that there is a significant difference between study habit and gender of secondary school students in Abua/Odual. The results in the tables show (from the mean scores) that males are more prone to study habit than the female counterparts.

**Research Question 2:** *To what extent does stress influence secondary school students retention ability?*

**Table 2: z-test Showing the Level of Significance of retention ability of secondary school students in Abua/Odual**

Stress on level of Retention		Group Statistics					z	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean				
Retention	High	348	2.21	0.321	0.030				
	Low	348	3.06	0.112	0.012				
Stress on level of Retention	Mean	Paired Differences				z	df	Sig. (2tailed)	
		Std. Deviation	Std. error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
High	1.15	0.11	0.030	2.022	2.416	1.251	964	0.005	
Low									

From table 2 above, it is observed that the z statistic,  $z = 1.251$  and  $p = 0.005$ ; that is, a very low probability of this result occurring by chance, under the null hypothesis of no difference. The null hypothesis is rejected, since  $p < 0.05$  ( $p = 0.005$ ). There is strong evidence ( $z = 1.251$ ,  $p = 0.005$ ) that there is a significant relationship between level of retention and stress on secondary school students in Abua/Odual. The results in the tables show (from the mean scores) that most students are more prone to low level retention than others.

**Research Question 3:** *To what extent does stress influence secondary school students delinquent behavior?*

**Table 3: z-test Showing the Level of Significance of stress on delinquent behavior of secondary school students**

Delinquent Behaviour		Group Statistics					z	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean				
Location:	Waterside	232	3.26	0.612	0.012				
	Semi-urban	232	3.19	0.341	0.032				
	Village	232	2.32	0.172	0.031				
Delinquent behaviour	Mean	Paired Differences				z	df	Sig. (2tailed)	
		Std. Deviation	Std. error Mean	95% Confidence Interval of the Difference					
Location:	0.07	0.002	0.011	1.213	2.453	3.16	694	.026	
Waterside									
Semi-urban									
Village									

From table 3 above, it is observed that the z statistic,  $z = 3.16$  and  $p = 0.026$ ; ie, a very low probability of this result occurring by chance, under the null hypothesis of no difference. The null hypothesis is rejected, since  $p < 0.05$  ( $p = 0.026$ ). There is strong evidence ( $z = 3.16$ ,  $p = 0.026$ ) that there is a significant relationship between stress and delinquent behaviours of secondary school students in Abua/Odual based on location. The results in the tables show (from the mean scores) that those living within the waterside area are mostly vulnerable and followed by those living within the semi-urban village areas.

**Research question 4:** *To what extent does stress influence secondary school students' level of truancy?*

**Table 4.8: z-test Showing the Level of Significance of stress on level of truancy of secondary school students in Abua/Odual Based on Gender.**

Level of Truancy		Group Statistics					z-cal	df	Sig. (2tailed)
		N	Mean	Standard deviation	Standard error of mean				
Gender	Male	366	2.33	0.221	0.030				
	Female	330	2.17	0.112	0.012				

  

Level of Truancy		Mean	Paired Differences			95% Confidence Interval of the Difference	z-cal	df	Sig. (2tailed)
			Std. Deviation	Std. error	Mean				
Gender	Male	0.35	1.01	0.021	2.132	3.413	3.16	694	0.035
	Female								

From table 4 above, it is observed that the t statistic,  $z = 3.16$  and  $p = 0.035$ ; ie, a very low probability of this result occurring by chance, under the null hypothesis of no difference. The null hypothesis is rejected, since  $p < 0.05$  ( $p = 0.035$ ). There is strong evidence ( $z = 3.16$ ,  $p = 0.035$ ) that there is a significant difference between truancy and gender of secondary school students in Abua/ Odual. The results in the tables show (from the mean scores) that male are mostly vulnerable and followed by the female students.

## DISCUSSION

The outcome of the study on the hypothesis that stated no significant difference between male and female secondary school students on the effect of stress on study habit was rejected by the analysis of data. How a student takes his or her studies, greatly determines his/her level of academic achievements. The level of preparation and learning strategies developed and employed consciously by students, go a long way to influence their level of academic performance. Thus, study habit is one of the greatest students or learning factors that hugely influences students' academic achievements. If undermined by students at all levels, teachers, administrators, parents and guardians, school counsellors and the government, then, the trend and menace of students' abysmal performance in both internal and external examinations would continue to boom and become more devastating and alarming. Mark and Howard (2009) are of the opinion that the most common challenge to the success of students in all ramifications is a lack of effective or positive (good) study habit. They further maintain that if students can develop a good study habit and with good discipline, they are bound to perform remarkably well in their academic pursuit. Husain (2000) stresses that lack of effective or positive (good) study habits is a critical study problem among students at all levels. Katelyn (2013) therefore, identifies fourteen positive or good study habits which students can employ in order to improve their academic performance. They are: attending all classes, reviewing your notes daily, reading material prior to it being covered in class, study daily, have at least one conference with the professor, develop and learn a word list for the course, read materials to improve your background in the course (other than text), attend help session, attend learning resource lab when available, develop a list of possible questions, ask questions in class, study an old exam (when available), avoid a last minute cram session, and sleep at least 8 hours the night before exams commence. In the same vein, Harper and Row (2009), highlight good study habits as thus: 1. Studying every day 2. Creating a quiet place at home or anywhere to study 3. Turning off the phone, TV and other devices that may disturb

you when studying 4. Listening to soft music or white noise 5. Studying in a way that suits your learning style 6. Taking regular breaks 7. Studying early (do not wait for last minutes) 8. Studying the hardest things first, spending more time on topics you find difficult 9. Asking for help if one is struggling with his studies, taking notes as one studies as well as organizing notes in a notebook or folder.

The result of the second hypothesis was also rejected. This showed that most students have low retention ability. Since stress is inevitable in our lives, all we can do is to seek ways to do to de-stress ourselves as much as possible. The following suggestions are useful.

- a. Develop a support network trusted friends, colleagues, relations and neighbours to avoid isolation and loneliness when things go wrong. With friends one discusses problems; confiding in trusted friends helps to reduce one's worries.
- b. Be prepared to take a critical second look why things do not work well for you.
- c. Cultivate the habit of reading for relaxing, Novels, Journals, magazines, newspaper contain materials that are antidote to stress.
- d. Exercise- There is evidence that physical health. It results in improved work performance, weight reduction and less tension. Anxiety, depression and stress are reduced by exercise (Falkuebury, 1987).
- e. Avoid setting unrealistic deadlines for yourself reflect on your ability and set realistic deadline, which you really can keep.
- f. Prayers, do-stress our minds at prayer we seek God's help and unburden our minds prayers have variously been called "a major tranquilizer" an "anti-depressant" and an "anti-stress-weapon" (Agulanna, 1999; 175).
- g. Effective time management: Time is the scarcest commodity. Time wasted cannot be recalled, reversed or retired. When a student or pupil wastes time, his school work increases and continues to remain unattended and undone.

When he thinks of the amount of work left undone in the face of a fast approaching test and examination, stress steals in and dominates his thinking faculty. He experiences time pressures and he rushes through his work to cover much in less time. Effective time management is the ability to plan, organize and control time. Agulanna (1999) made some of which are given below:

- i. Identify your objective
- ii. Prioritize them
- iii. Allot time and establish deadlines for the actions you intend to take.
- iv. Avoid physical and human interruptions as much as possible when you are working on a serious item. This is very important, responsible students hide themselves when reading to avoid distraction of any kind.
- v. Avoid indecision and procrastination
- h. Albert Ellis held that most of our problems originate from faulty reasoning; illogical conclusions and uncalled for self-blame. Teachers should instruct their students or pupils wrong or when they have problems to solve.
- i. Much of the students or pupils stress originate in the classroom. Teachers can do very much to reduce school-related stress by:
  - Reducing threats from other students/pupils in class by setting up clear expectations about classroom behavior.
  - Discussion and using conflict resolution strategies.
  - Following through and enforcing classroom rules.
  - Having a zero tolerance bullying in class.
  - Avoiding unrealistic deadlines.
  - Involving students/pupils in the class discipline so that they can help with the process.
  - Helping students/pupils to set specific, realistic and measurable goals.
  - Showing a willingness to listen and learn from students/pupils.

Hypothesis three was equally rejected, revealing that location where one lives matter in life. Home environment in no small measure influence the child behavior and the academic performance hence this progress or retrogress in life originate from there and forms the life pattern of such family. The

life pattern of the rural areas in Nigeria depends highly on the support of government (Federal, State, and Local). Today, in Nigeria, poverty has control of rural areas life, especially the unemployment governing the people and the poor state of security threatening the lives of the Nigerian people. The chosen democratic system of government has turned to be a death warrant signed by the people of Nigeria. This is because, the beauties associated with the democratic governance in principle is inversely practiced in relation to provision of the peoples essential and social amenities and sustainable lives. The above has for long develop stress of different kinds which automatically rendered the people of Abua/Odual L.G.A in a high level poverty. To this end Ukaome (1999) observed that the role of the family in child's socialization is a determining factor in the child's environment. He also said that socialization experience and family motivations contribute to the child's academic success in school. Stressing that the parents' occupation, social status and lifestyle of the parents determine the child's success and response to education.

Hence, the stress of all kinds, including high poverty level of the people makes the children involving in initiation into different cult behaviors respective of their ages, as experience has told us the children in most cases, are the ones to hawk food items and other articles around in the villages for several years, sometimes stop schooling or the practice of giving out as house boy/girl or early marriages which exposes children to danger, and also graduates then to hardened criminales.

The result of hypothesis four was also rejected showing that males were mostly truant than the females. On the above, we all remember "primary and secondary emotions" primary emotions are pre/emotions that come first in the order of origin, and from which other emotions depend. For example emotions that are associated with success or failure in achieving basic motivational goals, while secondary emotions are emotions that depend on primary emotion, for example. Aggression often depends on frustration.

In Abua/Odual L.G.A the people and children lives in the rural areas were people suffer to farm fish in the riverine areas of the Niger Delta region. This off-cause has been denied of the people by the pollution of the waters and environment degradation. The multinationals oil companies and the different political governments of Nigeria left nothing unturned to render the people of Abua into suffering wilderness instead of providing a sustainable green land of milk and honey.

Children therefore do not have interest of going to school. We have not actually untie the stress meted to rural citizens by politicians during and after elections, the provision of millions of naira and guns to youth aiding themselves to win elections, after abandoning the children to the urban areas to pursue their careers. This has also made the children to know how poor their families and thereby bringing in primary and secondary emotions to the people in the rural areas of the Niger Delta region, no child ever wants to suffer, either waste time in school.

They want quick money, and therefore associated themselves to the children who were earlier trained by the big politicians to acquire what they called the fast knowledge of getting rich.

Again, the truancy would be noticed if children are asked to study courses they do not want to study. Some families for go or in a way of maintaining status-co would force the child into studying particular courses.

Also, a teacher who is concerned about his students' emotions needs to learn about the conditions of their families. Such children often have emotional state which inhibits effective learning. At times they may appear actually slow or seem to lack motivation to work hard at school.

In Abua/Odual L.G.A to get the kind of a teaching staff in the primary schools who may periodically render the above services as practically not possible. Teachers who are constantly having a back log of unpaid salaries of six months, the one paid are in half salaries, would not border to do so because of how government has forgotten the rural youth's development the wealth of the concepts in the literature. The people of Abua/Odual L.G.A would be well educated of the usefulness of stress control measures, after being alerted of the causes of stress by considering the following factors:

- Personality type
- Home conditions
- Personal ambitions
- A high-risk environment and
- Lack of leisure

Therefore, in the control of stress, the people have been advice to de-stress themselves in the following ways:

- Avoid isolation and loneliness when things go wrong
- Cultivate the habit of reading for relaxation
- Exercise: There is evidence that physical exercise is good for one's physical and mental health (Falkenbury, 1987).
- Avoid setting unrealistic deadlines for yourself. Reflect on your ability and set.

### **SUMMARY**

The finding of the study identified the following as possible causes of stress. Inability to provide basic learning materials for the pupils, materials such as books, school uniforms and any other thing as may be required by the school. Another is trekking long distances from home to school daily, unconducive environment both at home and at school, death of parents or dependant, too many domestic activities to cope with after school lack of time to relax and play, maltreatment, long school hours and lack of infrastructure that could make learning comfortable. These factors as listed were among the causes of stress in children and adolescent as reveal by Yates (1979). According to him, factors such as excessive schooling, hostility, hunger, corporal punishment, abuse, domestic assignment and lack of recreation are potential factors that stress the young people. In the vein, studies are collaborative, Koripamo (1986), also listed the following as causes for stress, financial, emotional and social factors, others are loneliness unhappiness and lack of social relationship and suggestive of the fact that whatever that puts pressures on the school child and makes his work or think more than his capability is a factor to stress.

### **CONCLUSION**

In view of these finding and discussion it is revealed that most secondary schools students are stressed because they are involved in many domestic activities, after school ranging from baby-sitting of their siblings, fetching of water, and firewood, washing of plates and sweeping etc. others who are not from the wealthy families hawk items around the town after school, while those from wealthy homes are kept longer than necessary in schools in the name of extra-lessons.

All these combine stress the child and such stressful conditions invariably affect their academic achievement in schools.

**Implications for Counselling:** Counsellors with a reality therapy orientation consistently attempt to focus students on what they are doing now. Counsellors should relate what students are feeling or their physical symptoms to their current actions and thoughts. Counsellors hope to teach students to value the attitudes of accepting responsibility for their total behaviour. A counsellor should also help students make specific and better plans for themselves.

Students who feel worthlessness, that life is meaningless think suicide due to pressure of life. Note that it is not the pressure that is the problem, but their perception of the world around them. Counsellors should make them see the worth of their living, how people value their presence, how they are still useful to their family and to themselves. Counsellors should persuade students to "de-reflect" on their passive compulsive-obsessive disorders so that they can attend to a life full of potential meaning and value.

### **RECOMMENDATIONS**

The findings revealed some fundamental issues that need to be addressed with all seriousness if our children must be salvaged from the menacing effects of stress. Based on this the following have been recommended. Parents and guardians should be educated on the needs to assign work to children and equally enough time to relax. This is necessary because a relaxed mind thinks well and performs better.

Government should build more primary schools and build them closer to the people, this will take care of the problem of trekking or struggling with other communities for bus while going to school.

Boredom and loneliness are signs of stress and could manifest to hostility to forestall this recreational facilities should be provided in schools to enable children play and interact in a relax environment.

School curriculum should be designed considering long school periods and extra lessons that would keep children in school longer than necessary must be discouraged. Pupils get worn-out after these long periods yet some of them will be faced with other activities after school. Teachers should be able to identify signs of stress among pupils and vary his methods of teaching to motivate stressed children to learn.

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