



## Occupational Stress of Caregivers in Early Childhood Centres, Oyo State, Nigeria

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### **Authors' contributions**

*This work was carried out in collaboration between all authors. Author FTG designed the study, performed the statistical analysis, wrote the protocol, and wrote the first draft of the manuscript. Author POJ managed the analyses of the study. Author HOA managed the literature searches and performed part of the analysis. All authors read and approved the final manuscript.*

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### **ABSTRACT**

**Aims:** This study attempted to examine the types and extent of occupational stress of caregivers in early childhood centres.

**Study Design:** Descriptive survey design.

**Place and Duration of Study:** Oyo State, Nigeria, between January 2010 and March, 2011.

**Methodology:** To accomplish this aim, questionnaires (Caregivers Stress Index CSI) were administered on 500 early childhood caregivers from 11 local government areas

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through a multistage sampling technique. Out of which 426 questionnaires were returned useful and valid for the study.

**Results:** Using mean rating points, the survey orderly ranked workload-related, administration-related, professional career-related and children-related stress as the types of job-related stress experienced. It also established that colleagues-related stress, workload-related stress, and pupil-related stress are usually experienced by early childhood caregivers.

**Conclusion:** Demands of early childhood education centers and pressure have contributed to increasing caregivers' crises. Job-related activities in early childhood include potential difficulties which have impacted on caregivers' performance. The study, hence, recommends that greater attention and policy towards improving the quality of early childhood education in Nigeria.

*Keywords: Occupational stress; stressor; early childhood education; caregivers.*

## 1. INTRODUCTION

All-round development of a child is crucial towards the physical, intellectual, aesthetic, emotional, cognitive and social development and the proper development of a child is well likely to depict the child's performance at the start of formal education as well as life-long learning. [1] explained that Early Childhood Care and Education (ECCE) therefore covers children's survival, growth, development and learning programmes for children in order to establish holistic development for them. It also covers very diverse arrangements, from parenting programs to community-based child care, centre-based provision and formal pre-primary education, often in school. This is also the view of [2] on the concept. The importance and value of education in the early years of life have been acknowledged for more than 2000 years ago [3]. [4,5] indicated that early childhood education is a type of education given to children in a formal educational institution from ages of three to five plus but by 2004 [6], the scope has been widened to include the care of children between zero and three in the early childhood education and incorporated the programme into the Universal Basic Education Acts. By this there came about a standalone policy tagged, Integrated Early Childhood Development Policy [7] which [8] discussed to be in accordance with the global programme of Basic Education to reach every child. This is because early childhood education experiences, according to [9] are confirmed to positively affect children's later school involvement in education and life.

In Nigeria today, the subject of early childhood education is a topical issue as pre-school age marks a critical period of rapid physical, cognitive and psychosocial development of child [1]. The Federal Republic of Nigeria has come to the realization of the importance of this education in economic development and social transformation process, and accords priority to early childhood education. The [6] provides the template for the implementation of early childhood education in Nigerian educational policy by introducing early childhood education into educational policy with some stated objectives such as to effect a smooth transition from the home to school, child's preparation for elementary school level and inculcating into the child the spirit of enquiry, health habits, social skills and creativity. To achieve these stated objectives in ECCE, a healthy and competent early childhood workforce is an important aspect of the service. Activities in Early Childhood Centres therefore require adequate workforce for excellent performance and holistic development of children.

Research evidences [10,11]<sup>1</sup> suggest that work in early childhood centres is an aspect of service that can give rise to the experience of stress if the workforce is deficient. The workforces in early childhood centres are commonly referred to as caregivers who also assumed other child care roles of educators and therapeutic helpers to children in their custody. By this, care giving tasks are considered enormous which require efficient and adequate workforce<sup>[12,13]</sup>. According to these authors [12,13] caregivers of many early childhood centres are not well qualified; about 85 percent do not possess basic qualifications and more than half have no formal training. Hence, [14,15] also identified workforce along with other variables of basic learning facilities and resources, essential for the task to be lacking and deficient to provide strategic solution to problems of childhood education in Nigeria. Against the backdrop, the condition of workforce has generated stress which may impact negative effects on caregivers [13,16,17].

As stated in the [6] there are approximately 13,000 adults employed in Nigerian early childhood education, but little is known about their current job stressors. [18] posits that the workforce (adults) working in early childhood sectors are likely vulnerable to health crises due to stress. [19,20,21] mentioned specific infectious diseases found in children attending child care centres as respiratory, gastrointestinal and skin infections, scabies, head lice, meningitis, chickenpox, conjunctivitis, rubella, tuberculosis and hepatitis A and B. According to the authors, childcare workers who work with children under the age of two years have increased exposure to many of these diseases owing to closer contact with body fluids during napkin – changing procedures, nose wiping and managing teething babies. Working with young children is therefore a physically demanding job and places child care workers at risk of negative stress of different nature [20,22]. [23] also indicated that work appears as a major source of stress for caregivers.

Several authors [24,25,26,27,28] stated that defining stress is a very complex matter, which is the subject of different analyses and continuous debate among experts. In terms of physical, emotional and mental trauma, stress is defined as a condition of mental and physical exertion brought about as a result of harassing events or dissatisfying elements or general features of the working environment. [29] also referred to stress as the subjective mental state those results from exposure to a stressor. These explanations coincide with a research conducted by [30,31] as a product of multitude of demands (stressors) such as inadequate fit between what we need and what we are capable of, and what our environment offers and what it demands of us. To [32,33,34,35,36] stress is conceptualized as a negative and potentially harmful factor to health both physical and psychological.

[<sup>37</sup>]: [<sup>38</sup>] said in relation to coping ability, it is a state characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping. According to the authors, stress occurs when the perceived pressure exceeds your perceived ability to cope. Cognitive definitions are usually used within cognitive – behavioural coaching, stress counseling and stress management training arenas.

## **2. MATERIAL AND METHODOLOGY**

### **2.1 Review of Related Literature**

In the review of related literature, [39,40,41,42] indicated that there are essentially three different, but overlapping, approaches to the definition and study of stress. The first approach conceptualizes occupational stress as aversive or noxious characteristics of work environmental cause of ill-health. This approach has been termed the 'engineering model' by

[11,43,44]. Occupational stress is treated as a property of the work investment, and usually as an objectively measurable aspect of that environment. [43] further argued in the same vein, that the term stress should refer to the objective characteristics of situations. According to this approach by [44] stress was said to produce a strain reaction which although often reversible could, on occasions, prove to be irreversible and damaging. The concept of a stress threshold grew out of this way of thinking and individual differences in this threshold have been used to account for differences in stress resistance and vulnerability. The second approach on the other hand is the physiological approach. The physiological approach to the definition and study of stress commenced from the studies by [45,46]. According to the author, stress is a state manifested by a specific syndrome which consists of all the non-specific changes within the biological system that occur when challenged by aversive or noxious stimuli. The authors treated stress as a dependent variable – a particular physiological response to a threatening or damaging environment. Stress is treated as a generalized and non-specific physiological response syndrome. The third approach conceptualizes stress in terms of the dynamic interaction between the person and their work environment. [10,47] and [48] are of the opinion that stress is either inferred from the existence of problematic person – environment interactions or measured in terms of the cognitive processes and emotional reactions which underpin those interactions.

In relation to response to environment, [49,50] pointed out that a general definition characterizes stress as a process in which environmental forces threaten an individual's well-being. [51,52] considered stress in terms of stimulus, response and interaction with environment. [53] conceived stress as "a relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taking or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. However, uncertainty in the environment contributes to stress as identified by [54]. As the care receivers' condition changes, often for the worse, new demands are made on the caregiver and new fears arise concerning the future.

## **2.2 Stressors in Child Care Centres**

Stressors found in childcare centres include child behaviour and guidance issues, conflict or poor communication between staff and supervisors [55]. [56] in their own case discovered, parent-related demands and low pay and long hours of engagement as stressors. Others are low status, lack of relievers, unpaid overtime, limited resources [57] while [58] emphasized differing philosophies, work ethics, skills and training between workers and directors as additional variables. It is identified in literature, the categories of job-related stress in early childhood centres [10,59,60,53,61]. Stress is caused by a number of factors which include administration, workload, professional development-concern and relationship with colleagues [53,61]. [59] reiterated that the services of caregivers in early childhood centre are demanding and hence entail a lot of administrative roles, joint activities with colleagues, tasks of caring for the children. [62] also indicated that occupational stressor may be attributed to a variety of exposures which include psychological factors, interpersonal, organizational, environmental and physical demands.

The subject of stress experienced in early childhood centres in Nigeria is a topical issue as discussed by [63,64] because of its inevitability. [65] in their own view posited that stress in education is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work. It is imperative to state that the enactment of the policy that encourages the establishment of Early Childhood Care and Education in Nigeria may be a major factor responsible for stress in the early childhood education due to lack of visible government involvement in supervision, inspection and funding [1,66].

In Nigeria, early childhood education centres are mostly owned by private individuals and agencies, who as entrepreneurs desire to maximize profits. Thus, the few caregivers who usually attend to many children tend to experience stress which affects effectiveness as stated by [66]. This scenario then raised the following questions; what are the major types of job-related stress that caregivers in early childhood centers experience in Ibadan? To what extent do early childhood caregivers experience job stress? Hence the objectives of this study are to examine the type of job-related stress and the extent of such stresses in Early Childhood Centres in Ibadan, Oyo State. The capital city of Oyo State is known as one of the oldest states in Nigeria which embraced early formal education brought by the colonists. The city is one of the largest cities in the African continent. It used to be the capital of the old western region. The expansion of early childhood centres in the metropolis is growing fast as a result of urbanization and change in family life-style which creates a high demand from the society. The international documents of Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC) and Education for All (EFA) also serve as strong basis for the increase in the number of early childhood education centres. Besides, Early Childhood Centres have been confirmed by [15] to be one of the major sources of employment, even for secondary school leavers in the cities. According to this study, the entire edifice of crèche/ pre-primary education is shaky if the performance of caregivers is weak and ineffective. Therefore, the study investigated the types and extent of job-related stress that the caregivers experienced in their day-to-day activities with children in Ibadan.

### **2.3 Research Methodology**

The study is a descriptive survey of job-related stress of caregivers in early childhood education centres in Ibadan. The population for the study consisted of the entire early childhood centres in 11 local government areas. Ibadan, the capital of Oyo State is confirmed in the course of the pilot survey conducted, to possess largest cluster of early childhood education centres in Oyo state. A total of 500 caregivers (2 respondents each, from 250 centres) were selected using the simple random sampling technique from the 11 local government areas in Ibadan. However, only 426 respondents returned well completed questionnaires. The research instrument used to collect data for the study was "Caregivers Stress Index" (CSI). The instrument was developed [59];[61], modified and adopted by [61]. The CSI for this study comprises two sections. Section A was a 5-sectioned 4-point scale where "Strongly Agree" is coded 4 "Agree" is coded 3 "Disagree" is coded 2 and "Strongly Disagree" is coded 1. Section B was a 5-sectioned 3-point scale where "always" is coded 3 "sometime" is coded 2 and "Not at all" is coded 1. The instrument measured responses of caregivers in respect of the types of stress that the caregivers usually experience on the job. The criteria against which their responses were measured were administration – related stress, pupil – related stress, workload-related stress, professional growth-related stress and colleagues – related stress. These criteria were identified with a view to examining the type of and the extent to which the caregivers experience them. Hence, the stress factor with the highest sum, mean, frequency and percentage is the one that is experienced most. The appropriate use of mean coefficient of dispersion and root mean square deviation were adopted in determining the extent of variation of the related stress identified.

To ensure the reliability of the instrument, 100 questionnaires were administered on caregivers outside the scope of the study by split-half approach, measuring the consistency. The questionnaires were subjected to reliability analysis employing the Cronbach Alpha Statistics. The instrument thus yielded high reliability coefficient (CSI)  $r_{20.75}$ . After the 426 questionnaires that were properly completed were returned, they were scored, coded and

subjected to frequency counts, percentages and mean rating. The cooperation enjoyed in the collection of sizeable numbers of questionnaires was as result of pilot survey initially conducted and the unusual experience of the respondents with a researcher studying on a subject that affects their career in the study area.

### 3. RESULTS AND THE DISCUSSION

To answer the first question raised which formed the basis for the first objective, five job-related stress identified in the literature were subjected to empirical test. The related stresses are administration, pupil, workload, professional concern and colleagues related stress. There are four sub-variables under the administration and workload related stress and five sub- variables on pupil, professional concern and colleagues related stress. All the sub-variables were ranked on 4-point Likert Scale. The total response is coded, scored and analyzed under the sub-variable scores. Table 1 presents the result of the findings.

Research Question One: What are the Types of Job-related Stress in Early Childhood Centres?

**Table 1. Types of job-related stress among early childhood caregivers**

Types	Sub-variable score	N	Sum	Mean (x)	%	Rank
Administration Related Stress	1,106 1,402 1,454 1,381	426	5,343	12.54	21.47	2
Pupil Related Stress	1,479 1,493 698 1,472	426	5,143	12.07	20.67	4
Workload Related Stress	1,328 1,380 1,388 1,388	426	5,484	12.87	22.03	1
Professional Concern- Related Stress	1,400 1,247 1,200 1398	426	5,245	12.31	21.07	3
Colleagues	828 879 854 1,113	426	3,674	8.62	14.76	5
<b>Total Respondents' Feedback</b>			<b>24,888</b>			

Source: Field Survey (2010)

The results of Table 1 indicate the types of job-related stress that are usually experienced by early childhood caregivers in different ranks. First, workload-related stress category (sum =

5,484; Mean = 12.87; 22.03%) and administration – related stress category (sum = 5,343; Mean = 12.54, 21.47%) were found to be the types of job-related stress experienced most in early childhood education centres. Second, professional concern-related stress (sum = 5245; Mean = 12.31; 21.07%) and pupil-related stress (sum = 5,142; Mean = 12.07; 20.6%) were confirmed to be another type of stress usually experienced by early childhood caregivers. Again, Colleagues – related stress was found to be another type of job-related stress (sum = 3,674; Mean = 8.62; 14.76%), experienced in early childhood centres in Ibadan.

Research Question: To what Extent do the Caregivers experience Stress?

**Table 2. Extent of job-related stress among early childhood caregivers**

Factors	Always		Sometimes		Not at all	
	Freq.	%	Freq.	%	Freq.	%
Administration Related Stress	107	25.12	300	70.42	19	4.46
Pupil – Related Stress	178	41.78	115	27.00	133	31.22
Workload Related Stress	210	49.39	140	37.86	76	17.84
Professional Concerns Stress	265	62.20	95	22.30	66	15.49
Colleagues – Related Stress	190	44.60	80	18.78	156	36.62

Table 2 presents the extent of job-related stress in early childhood centre as identified in Table 1. From the Table, majority of the respondents (70.42%) indicated that they sometimes experience stress with administration style; 25.12% confirmed that they always experience stress with the same activities, while few respondents (4.46%) claimed that they do not experience any stress with administration style. Also, majority of the respondents (41.78%) indicated that they always experience stress with attending to pupils in early childhood centres. While 27.00% of the respondents sometimes experienced the stress attached with this activity, 31.22% respondents confirmed that they do not witness this type of related stress. Similarly, majority of the respondents (49.30%) indicated that they always experience stress because of too much workload and contents, while 32.86% of the respondents sometimes experience stress with the same activity. Other activities where the caregivers always experience stress were professional concerns related stress 62.20% and relation with colleagues in the school (44.60%). In other to further examine the overall extent of stress related activities, mean coefficient of dispersion and root mean square deviation were determined from the results in Table 2. These were determined in other to establish the extent of variation among the identified stress-related activities in the study area. Table 3 further presents the results.

The results of relative deviation from the mean value in Table 3 indicate that while professional related stress (Mean=2.467;  $\sigma=0.745$ ), workload related stress (Mean=2.315;  $\sigma=0.757$ ) and administration related stress (Mean=2.207;  $\sigma=0.503$ ) were usually experienced by the caregivers, colleagues related stress (Mean=2.080;  $\sigma=0.8977$ ), pupil –related stress (Mean=2.106;  $\sigma=0.848$ ) are least experienced in the early childhood centres. This implies further that combinations of stress are found in the tasks of care giving in the study area.

**Table 3. General Assessment of the Extent or Variation of Stress experienced by the Caregivers**

<b>Stress factors quare</b>	<b>Mean</b>	<b>Mean deviation</b>	<b>Mean coefficient of dispersion</b>	<b>Root mean deviation (<math>\sigma</math>)</b>
Administration Related Stress	2.207	0.399	0.181	0.503
Pupil Related Stress	2.106	0.747	0.355	0.848
Workload Related Stress	2.315	0.676	0.292	0.757
Professional Related Stress	2.467	0.663	0.269	0.748
Colleagues Related Stress	2.080	0.8208	0.395	0.898

#### 4. SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The study was designed to examine the type and extent of job-related stress experienced by the caregivers in early childhood education centres in Oyo state, Nigeria. The responses were obtained through questionnaires which were sufficiently comprehensive and identified stress related-activities in early childhood centres (daycares) in the study areas. The outcome of the study revealed that caregivers in early childhood education centres are vulnerable to stress. Thus awareness has been raised that activities in early childhood education centres are characterized with stress. Caregivers experience stress due to the activities they perform every time. These activities include administration, attending to children, workload, aspiration for professional development and relationship between colleagues in the place of work.

Likewise, the extent of the related stress varied from one activity to the other. By being aware of the level of activity vulnerable to stress, the caregivers can proactively pursue a plan to reduce this vulnerability to better cope with the daily stressful events while caring for children. Effective administration and management of educational services for the young children is important for a quality early childhood education programme. The functionality of other variables of quality early childhood education programme rests heavily on this.

The findings in the study validated the research conducted by [67] that stress emanates from different activities such as workload, interaction with colleague and even at varied degrees. This work also confirmed the previous studies that stress can be caused by a number of factors called stressors such as administration, workload, professional development concern and relationship with colleagues [59,61]. It is against the foregoing reasons that many caregivers find the work demand and task of childcare difficult and at times stressful. This awareness hence calls for appropriate policy towards improving ECCE in Nigeria. Further studies are therefore required in determining the effect of the types of stress on children and the management strategies.

#### 5. RECOMMENDATIONS

This study has empirically established that stress pervades early childhood education centres in Oyo State. Against the foregoing findings, the following recommendations are made:



Caregivers to be employed into Nigeria early childhood care centres should be trained personnel as this would have equipped them for the expectations attached to the work. There is also the need for school management board to organize seminars and workshops for the teachers/caregivers on the job on regular basis to furnish them with what is expected of them in any childhood service and to arm them with necessary coping strategies in order to facilitate positive caring process.

Greater attention should be given to improving work-related conditions of caregivers in order to improve the quality of service and care to be given to children. Improvement in the supply of teaching and learning materials as well as improved general working status of the caregivers is also imperative.

Employment of adequate caregivers to care for children in early childhood education centres will reduce stress is of great necessity. Emphasis and enforcement of quality service in early childhood centres should be ensured and sustained in Nigeria. Hence, a standing policy for integrated care should be given adequate attention by the education stake-holders.

Adoption of stress management techniques should be embraced by caregivers. This can be achieved through trainings and workshops.

## **COMPETING INTERESTS**

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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