

**STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG MARRIED ADULT LEARNERS IN THE WORK AND STUDY PROGRAMME OF EBONYI STATE UNIVERSITY, ABAKALIKI NIGERIA**

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**ABSTRACT:** *The study investigated the causes of stress for adult learners in the Work and Study programme in Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki. Specifically the study assessed the extent to which family expectations societal expectations, crowded classrooms, short period of study and lack of committed teachers cause stress for adult learners in the work and study programme. The population for this study consisted of all the adult learners in the Work and Study programme in the Faculty of Education numbering 630, while the sample size was 140. Five research questions guided the study. The instrument for data collection was a researcher made instrument named Adult Learners' Stressors Assessment Scale (ALSAS) which is a four – point modified Likert scale with four clusters (A - D) and 25 items. Data collected were analyzed using mean and standard deviation. The findings of the study revealed that the adult learners in Ebonyi State University in the Work and Study programme are stressed by family expectations, societal expectations, and the shortness of the period under which they have to cover the whole work meant for their programme. To them, the teachers or the crowded classrooms do not constitute stress. Recommendations were also made for example that they should accept counselling for stress management strategies.*

**KEYWORDS:** Adult learners, work and study, stress, stressors

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## **INTRODUCTION**

Adult learners have been conceptualized from different perspectives. Operationally, Thomas (1981) observed that an adult learner is anyone who participates in any form of adult education activity. He is different from the young learner in more ways than just size and age; and the adult class is different from a class in formal schooling because, in his own view, Thomas maintained that:

1. some believe they are too old to learn, they are worried about whether they can keep up, whether others will laugh at them if they make mistakes;
2. some have never been to school before; they do not know what to expect;
3. some have been to school but have bad memories of the experience, possibly they could not cope, or failed an examination or were severely punished;
4. most of them probably work, on a farm, or in a home or in a shop, or in a factory. Going to an adult class is not their main occupation;
5. many of them are married, many are fathers or mothers, they have responsibilities at home and may be worried about problems such as sick child, shortage of food, family arguments or lack of money to pay school fees, and
6. some have community responsibilities such as being a committee of a co-operative or a local counsellor or a member of a women's club or church worker or an officer of a trade union (p. 87)

The above listed beliefs, assumptions or situations cause a lot of stress to the adult learners. In Ebonyi State of Nigeria there are many adult learners. The State is a young State and had been listed as one of the educationally backward states that needs a lot of catching up. This catching up brought about adult enrolment into the University and hence more stress for the adult learners. Neaves in Oboegbulem (2002) saw stress as the way human beings respond to conditions that scare, threaten, anger, bewilder or excite them. When stress persists there is a tendency for an occurrence of fatigue, breakdown in human perceptual machines, or even damages to the body systems, which may result in mental physical failure.

Stress as conceptualized by Uzoka (2005) is pressure from an adverse force or influence that imposes unusual demand on an organism. He went on to explain that stress occurs when there are demands on the person which tax or exceed the person's adjustive resources. The stimuli that cause stress are called stressor stimuli or stressors. Stress that are peculiar to adult learner are often classified under societal, organizational and role-related stress (Oboegbulem 2002). Ezeilo (2005) observed that severe stress in the Nigerian undergraduate (learners) seems to be the rule rather than exception. Like any other person changes and vicissitudes of life are stressful.

Societal stress as far as adult learners are concerned results from pressure put on them by members of their families, community and others in the societal to be like others, or at least change their economic and social status. Organizational stress comes from the work places for some of these adult learners who are under pressure to update their certificates. Role-related stress comes as a result of the psychological well being of the individual and his ego defense, which compels him to improve himself for his self image. The adult learners in the work and study programme of Ebonyi State University are workers or business people who have families, have community responsibilities and may have been out of schools for many years. In the school they have lectures from twelve noon until six o'clock on Fridays; and eight o'clock until six o'clock on Saturdays. They come to school with stress written all over them, often hungry as they have to hurry from their places of work to meet up with the lecture time table. They are often so fatigued that many sleep off during lectures. Many are not able to cope, so they continue to carry over courses for many years. The result is that they fail to graduate or graduate many years after their probable year of graduation.

The adaptation theory of stress as put forward by Mmaduakonam (1997) states that physical environment like light, noise, temperature, status, group level, happenings at work and outside work situations are stressors.. However, the way a person perceives a situation will determine whether it will be stressful or not and even the outcome of stress. Accordingly, any physical environment like a noisy class or the continuous need for change of status is stressful. Stress is a biological phenomenon experienced by people when faced with adverse conditions. The study is therefore an attempt to find out the stressors that affect the adult learners in the Work and study programme in Ebonyi State University and make recommendations to alleviate their stress.

### **Purpose of the Study**

This study was aimed at finding out the cause of stress among adult learners in the work and study programme of Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki.

### Research Questions

The five research questions which guided the study and include:

1. Is family expectations cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?
2. Is societal expectations cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?
3. Is crowded classrooms cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?
4. Is the short period of study cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?
5. Is lack of committed teacher's cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

### METHODS

A descriptive survey research design was adopted to collect data from the entire adult learner in the work and study programme in the seven departments of the faculty of education of Ebonyi State. Since the population is large - 630 (Source: Work and Study Directorate, Ebonyi State University, 2012) only 20 students who are married were selected from the seven departments, giving a sample of 140 respondents. The instrument for data collection was a researcher made instrument named Adult Learners' Stressors Assessment Scale (ALSAS) which is a four – point modified Likert scale with four clusters (A - D) and 25 items. The instrument was subjected to content, face and construct validation by experts in the field. The reliability of the instrument was established for internal consistency using the Cronbach Alpha which yielded reliability co-efficient of 0.66 after a test-retest carried out in a purposively selected Adult Education Government owned centre in the state. The supervisor related factor variable was controlled by the pre-survey workshop for all research assistants.

### RESULTS AND FINDINGS

The results of the study were presented in tables 1 – 5 based on the research questions raised.

**Research question one:** Is family expectations cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

**Table 1:** Mean rating of the extent to which family expectations cause stress for adult learner in the work and study programme

Items	Family related expectations	$\bar{x}$	SD
1.	My wife/husband wants me to further my education.	3.58	1.13
2.	My wife/husband feels that I am not measuring up to his present status	3.24	1.12
3.	My children demand so much that my present income cannot carry me.	3.26	0.44
4.	My parents are aging and make a lot of medical financial expenses.	3.19	0.34
5.	My in-laws are so demanding that I just have to upgrade my earnings	3.35	0.34
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>3.26</b>	<b>0.62</b>

Result of data analysis presented on Table 1 shows that family related expectation cause stress for adult learners in the work and study programme in Ebonyi State. The grand mean for the responses is 3.26 and SD of 0.62 on a 4-point scale. The grand mean is above 2.5 decision rule; therefore it shows that families are stressors.

## RESEARCH QUESTION TWO

Is societal expectations cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

**Table 2:** Mean rating of the extent to which societal expectation cause stress for adult learners in the work and study programme in Ebonyi State

Items	Societal related expectations	$\bar{x}$	SD
6.	My community wants me to be the chairman of the general assembly	2.75	0.68
7.	My community expects me to build a better house	3.42	0.62
8.	I am often expected to donate in launchings made in my community	3.22	0.57
9.	People in my village make derogatory remarks about my car	2.87	0.64
10.	My age group are always buying new uniform for every occasion	2.77	0.62
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.62</b>

Result of data analysis presented on Table 2 shows that societal related expectations cause stress for adult learners in Ebonyi State. On the 4-point scale grand mean responses is 2.67 which is above the 2.5 decision rule and hence it can be concluded that the society is stressor for adult learners.

## Research Question Three

Is crowded classrooms cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

**Table 3:** Mean rating of the extent to which crowded classrooms cause stress or adult learners in Ebonyi State

Items	Crowded classrooms related stress	$\bar{x}$	SD
11.	Our classrooms are so crowded that we have to sit six on benches meant for four	2.16	0.46
12.	At times some students have to stand for lectures	2.23	0.57
13.	The classrooms are always stuffy due to over population	1.86	0.62
14.	We often have to sit eight on bench during exams	2.26	0.64
15.	Crowded classrooms upset me so much	2.32	0.58
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>2.16</b>	<b>0.57</b>

Again the summary of the result presented in Table 3 indicated that for crowded classrooms the grand mean 2.16 is below the 2.5 decision rule showing that crowded classrooms are not seen as stressors for adult learners in Ebonyi State.

## Research Question Four

Is the short period of study cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

**Table 4:** Mean rating of the extent to which short periods of study cause stress for adult learners in Ebonyi State

Items	Short periods related stress	$\bar{x}$	SD
16.	I have this feeling that we are always racing for time in this programme	3.65	0.64
17.	I have to cover so much in so short a time	2.67	0.62
18.	I hardly learn the concept before new ones are introduced	2.86	0.64
19.	I with I had more time to be able to cope	2.76	0.58
20.	I hardly rest from exams before the new semester commences	3.24	0.58
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>2.87</b>	<b>0.62</b>

The result of the data analysis for Table 4 also shows that shortness of the periods for study is cause of stress for adult learners in Ebonyi State; since the grand mean for the items amounted to 2.87 which is also greater than the decision rule of 2.25.

### Research Question Five

Is lack of committed teachers' cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?

**Table 5:** Mean rating of the extent to which lack of committed teachers' cause stress or adult learners in Ebonyi State

Items	Lack of committed teachers' related stress	$\bar{x}$	SD
<b>21</b>	Our teachers are not always punctual to lectures	2.22	0.56
<b>22</b>	Our teacher are often irregular to lectures	2.13	0.59
<b>23</b>	The teacher often do block teaching	1.65	0.58
<b>24</b>	Many of the teachers do not finish the course outline	2.18	0.62
<b>25</b>	Many of the teachers care less what grades we make	2.41	0.61
<b>Grand mean</b>		<b>2.12</b>	<b>0.63</b>

Again the summary of the result presented in Table 5 indicated that for lack of committed teachers' related stress the grand mean of 2.12 is below the 2.5 decision rule.

## DISCUSSION

Research question 1 sought to find out if family expectations cause stress for adult learners in the work and study programme of Ebonyi State University. In table one the responses to items 1 – 5 shows that the grand mean of 3.26 is greater than the 2.5 decision rule. This agrees with Thomas (1981) in his assertion that many adult learners have family responsibilities at home and may be worried about problems such as sick child or lack of money. The family dependants like the children, aged parents and extended relatives expect so much from the workers in their family.

Research question 2 asked if societal expectations cause stress for adult learners in the work and study programme. Table two with items 6 – 10 provided the answer from the respondents, which yielded a grand mean of 2.65 which is greater than the cut off mark of 2.5. This agrees with Ezeilo (2005) who observed that severe stress in the Nigerian society seems to be the rule rather than exception. Thomas (1981) also opined in his 6<sup>th</sup> problem of adult learners that some of them have community responsibilities that affect their lives. It was earlier observed that Ebonyi State had been listed as an educationally backward state that

needs a lot of catching up. The societal expectation for Ebonyians is that they should be able to take up appointed left by others who have to go back to their own state at the creation of Ebonyi State.

Research question 3 found out that crowded classrooms were not seen by the adult learners as constituting stressors for them. One may wonder why students are comfortable with crowded classrooms, unless there is another rewarding part to a crowded classroom like 'giraffing'. Giraffing as Azelama (2005) explained is a situation where a person tries to stretch his/her neck in a giraffe-like manner in order to catch a glimpse of something that is not very close. Research question 4 which has to do with the short periods of study also cause stress to the adult learners. The grand mean is 2.87 of the responses is again greater than 2.5 decision rule. Uzoka (2005) had conceptualized stress as pressure from an adverse force or influence that imposes unusual demand on an organism. The adult learners have both organizational and role-related stress to battle with which agrees with Oboegbulem's (2002) contribution classes of stress peculiar to adult learners.

Research question 5 asked 'Is lack of committed teachers' cause of stress for adult learners in the work and study programme?' Again the summary of the result presented in table 5 indicated that for lack of committed teachers' related stress the grand mean of 2.12 is below the 2.5 decision rule, indicating that either the teachers are committed or their lack of commitment does not pose a stressor for adult learners in the work and study programme.

## CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

The findings of the study have revealed that the adult learner in Ebonyi State University in the Work and Study programme are stressed by family expectations, societal expectations, and the shortness of the period under which they have to cover the whole work meant for their programme. To them, the teachers neither constitute stress, nor the crowded classrooms which may well suit their purpose for exam 'giraffing' or other forms of examination malpractices. Since persistent stress has the tendency for an occurrence of fatigue, breakdown in human perceptual machines, or even damages to the body systems, which may result in mental physical failure it is recommended:

1. That sensitization workshop on stress management should be organized by government and institutions to help individuals to improve their stress management strategies.
2. That government should continue to give in-service training to deserving workers to update their certificates and improve their lot in life, in place of work and study programme.
3. At the institutional level lecture halls should be made more comfortable and suitable for lecturers and examinations and lecturers should be more committed to their duties.
4. At the personal level individuals should set their priorities right and not allow others to ruin their lives, they should accept counselling for stress management strategies like: relaxation techniques – whether progressive muscular relaxation or meditation, aerobic exercises, coping strategies (which may be problem or emotion focused), social support or use of biofeedback.

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