



Hardiness, Sensation Seeking, Optimism and Social Support as Predictors of Stress Tolerance among Private Secondary Schools Teachers in Lagos State

Segun-Martins Ibironke Opeyemi*

Department of Pure and Applied Psychology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria

*Corresponding author: Segun-Martins Ibironke Opeyemi, Department of Pure and Applied Psychology, Adekunle Ajasin University, Akungba-Akoko, Ondo State, Nigeria, E-mail: monique.seguin@uqo.ca

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Abstract

This study investigated the extent to which hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism and social support predicts stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria. Using an ex post-facto design, 272 teachers (123 males; 149 females) were selected from 8 private secondary schools in Lagos State. Their ages ranged from 21 to 58 years with a mean age of 37.57 years (SD=11.29). The study instruments contain short hardiness scale, sensation seeking scale, optimism scale, social support scale and stress tolerance scale. Six hypotheses were generated and tested using Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Hierarchical Multiple Regression Analysis. The result showed that hardiness significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=-0.24$; $t=-5.90$; $p<0.01$). Sensation seeking significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=0.18$; $t=3.88$; $p<0.01$). Also, optimism significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=-0.18$; $t=-3.72$; $p<0.01$). Similarly social support had a positive relationship with stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($r=(270) =.562$; $p<0.01$). However, educational qualification significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=0.27$; $t=-3.85$; $p<0.01$). Finally, the multiple regression analysis also indicated that hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support jointly predicts stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers [$F(1,268)=27.25$; $p<0.01$]. Thus, it is recommended that management should employ more qualified teachers and provide conducive work environment for their employees.

Keywords: Hardiness; Sensation seeking; Optimism; Social support; Stress tolerance

Introduction

Background to the Study

Psychological studies that have investigated the stress tolerance among academicians, especially following the ever-increasing demands of change associated with developments in technology, and curriculum [1]. Human stress is not a new concept they have been a subject of investigation for a long time now. However, these investigations have seldom been centred among individuals in the teaching profession [1].

Stress is an adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging or threatening to the person's well-being [2]. Stress is the person's reaction to a situation, not the situation itself. Moreover, we experience stress when we believe that something will interfere with our need Fulfilment [1]. Stress is generally defined as the body's nonspecific response or reaction to demands made on it, or to disturbing events in the environment. It is a process by which we perceive and cope with environmental threats and challenges [3]. Personal and environmental events that cause stress are known as stressors [2]. Therefore, stress is simply defined as emotional disturbances or changes caused by stressors. Workplace stress has been shown to have a detrimental effect on the health and well-being of academic employees [1], as well as a negative impact on workplace productivity and profits [4].

However, while compared to others, teaching has been identified as one of the most stressful occupation in many countries [4]. An intriguing problem facing stress researchers has been the individual variability of stress reaction. Teachers respond differently to stress, and also not all teachers are equally vulnerable to its effect. It is also opined that the experience of stress is a very personal matter Goldberger and Breznitz [5], and each person must have developed his or her own coping styles for getting through life successfully and it is the breakdown of these coping patterns that cause stress in a person. Even when exposed to a minor stressful situation, certain people experience high level of stress and become ill, while others experience much less stress and remain calm and composed [1].

Teaching related stress, commonly termed 'teacher stress', is defined as a teacher's experience of "unpleasant, negative emotions, such as anger, anxiety, tension, frustration, or depression, resulting from some aspect of their work as a teacher" [6]. Sources of teacher stress are varied [7]. Some of the more common sources include the need to make adaptations to sudden curriculum changes and feeling of disempowerment [8-10]. Apart from school curriculum changes, a change in school structure may also be a source of stressor. Such change causes erosion of collegial relationship and fosters feeling of inequity and uncertainty [11].

The term 'Stress Tolerance' refers to a person's ability to withstand stress without becoming seriously impaired [1]. Stress tolerance is a term related to effective coping and coping strategies. It is the ability of a person to handle emotionally charged situations and to tolerate stress, in demanding environments. Stress tolerance is defined as the

ability to endure stress, strain and pain without serious harm [1]. Pestonjee [12] and Franken et al. [13] are of the opinion that work related stress is inevitable and workers vary in their ability to tolerate well with stress.

Hardiness is a personal characteristic adjusting the way to tolerate with the stressful situations [14]. The construct of hardiness was first introduced by Kobasa [15], who defined it as a resistance resource in the encounter with stressful situations. It is considered as a pattern of personality characteristics comprising three mutually related dispositions - commitment, control, and challenge [15,16]. Hardy teachers tend to appraise potentially stressful events as less threatening and less undesirable than others do Rhodewalt and Zone [17], Wiebe [18] and Sezgin [19] and have more responsible work behaviours and are more efficient in stressful tasks Manning et al. [20] which in turn may help in their ability to tolerate stressful events, situation, and tasks.

Sensation seeking is another personality trait that helps individuals manages stress [21]. It was first described by Zuckerman [22], sensation seeking is a generalized preference for high or low levels of sensory stimulation. Sensation seeking is a personality trait defined by the search for experiences and feelings that are "varied, novel, complex and intense" and by the readiness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences [13,22].

Sensation seeking is a dimension of personality that has been defined by the need for varied, novel, complex, and intense sensory stimulation and the level of risk taken in an effort to satisfy the desire for such stimulation. High Sensation Seeking has been associated with participation in a variety of intense, antigenic stimulus events such as viewing horror movies [22].

Optimism is another variable that predict stress tolerance level among private school teachers. Optimism reflects an individual's expectation of a positive outcome in most situations. It has been argued that optimism enables the individual to set goals, make commitments, tolerate with adversity and pain and recover from trauma and stress [23]. In comparison, pessimists are more likely to deal with stress by giving up or by engaging in denial [23,24].

Social Support is a broad concept that has been studied across disciplines evolving from psychology, sociology and medicine [25]. It is define as the perception and actuality that one is cared for, has assistance available from other people, and that one is part of a supportive social network. These supportive resources can be emotional (e.g., nurturance), tangible (e.g., financial assistance), informational (e.g., advice), or companionship (e.g., sense of belonging) and intangible (e.g. personal advice) [26].

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this research is to establish prediction between hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism and social support and how these variables will interact to predict stress tolerance among the private school teachers.

Review of Related Studies on Stress and Stress Tolerance

Several studies Kahill [27] and Lee et al. [28] found that perceived occupational stress has been associated with high psychological demand that often induce stress. Stilwell et al. [29] submitted that

teachers who remain in teaching job with inadequate numbers of teachers would experience added stress and greater workload.

Hari and Soumya [30], Biju and Sananda [31] that have examined the relationship between teacher's occupational stress and their qualification have shown that postgraduate teachers have significantly less job satisfaction on job role item than the undergraduate and graduate teachers [32]. Hong Kong teachers without finishing professional training and of junior rank reported themselves to be more burned out in a study by [33]. Quite opposite to this, teacher's qualification was not correlated to their stress level [34]. Other data support no significant difference between stress and academic qualifications of the teachers [35].

Hardiness and Stress Tolerance

Despite a common acknowledgement that personality factors play a critical role mediating stress, these factors have been overlooked in majority of empirical studies on stress [35]. A notable exception has been a series of studies carried out by [15,36]. Kobasa et al. [36] explored the concept of "personality hardiness" as a resistance resource that mediates the negative consequences of high level stress. Hardiness reflects the individual's response to life events both personally and professionally [15,37].

Sensation Seeking and Stress Tolerance

Zuckerman et al. [38] cited that individuals high in sensation-seeking have a tendency to involve in variety of works that is seen as stressful. In other words, high sensation-seekers are less likely to label risky behaviours as risky as and more likely to either try or repeat a variety of risky activities than their peers that are low in sensation-seeking [39]. Studies have found that sensation-seeking is higher in private schools than in public school [40]. This may explain part of the developmental basis of sensation-seeking and reckless/risky behaviour [41,42].

Dispositional Optimism and Stress Tolerance

The dispositional optimism literature pioneered by Scheier et al. [43], views optimism as generalized positive expectations about future events. Research suggests that optimists cope with stress in more adaptive ways than pessimists [24]. Optimists are more likely to engage in action-oriented, problem-focused coping, are more willing than pessimists to seek social support, and are more likely to emphasize the positive in their appraisals of stressful events. In comparison, pessimists are more likely to deal with stress by giving up or by engaging in denial. In a related line of research, Christopher Peterson and Martin Seligman have studied how people explain bad events (personal setbacks, mishaps, disappointments, and such). They identified a pessimistic explanatory style in which some people tend to blame setbacks on their personal shortcomings [44].

Social Support and Stress Tolerance

McCauley [45] indicated that the social relation integral to an exercise environment are significant determinants of subjective wellbeing, including ability to tolerate stress among teachers. McCulloch [46] found that social support was a significant predictor of mental health outcome. A low level of social support causes stress and worsening of physical functioning. McCauley et al. [45] also suggested that psychological functioning were associated with a higher level of

social support. Supportive relationships within social networks are essential for enhancing stress tolerance and ensuring happiness in later life [47].

Caplan and Killelea [48] consider social support to be significant when dealing with a stressful situation. Also, a great deal of research reports it as an important source of emotional support that facilitates the psychological adjustment to stress. Perceive social support act as a barrier against high-stress for individuals, satisfy their feelings of commitment and help protect and strengthen feelings of identity. Having a low level of social support can negatively affect individuals' mental status [49]. Social support has shown to exert positive influence on dealing with stress Holahan et al. [50], help tolerate stress Ford et al. [51], Gentry and Kobasa [52], Kobasa [36], and received social support, such as the frequency of helpful interactions [24].

Research Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant positive relationship between social support and stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.
2. Educational status will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.
3. Hardiness will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.
4. Sensation seeking will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.
5. Optimism will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.
6. Hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support will have a significant joint prediction on stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers.

Methods

Research design

This study adopted ex post-facto design. The independent variables are hardiness, Sensation seeking, optimism, and social support while the dependent variable is stress tolerance.

Study setting

The study was conducted among teachers who were selected as participants from eight (8) private secondary schools in Lagos State. A total number of 350 questionnaires were administered but the researcher found only 272 copies analysable.

Sampling technique

The researcher employed an accidental sampling technique because only those available at the time of the distribution of the questionnaire were used.

Participants

Data were collected from 272 participants comprising 123 males (45.2%), 149 females (54.8%), whose age ranged from 21 and 58 with a mean age of (37.57) and the standard deviation of (11.29). The demographic variable is represented as thus. In term of Marital status 133 were single (48.9%), 121 were married (44.5%), 11 were divorce (4.0%), 7 were widowed (2.6%). In term of educational status 108 were

OHD/NCE (39.7%), 130 were HND/BSC (47.8%), 34 were postgraduate (12.5%). In term of length of service 51 were 0-1years (18.8%), 78 were 2-5 years (28.7%), 40 were 6-10 years (14.7%), 103 were 11 years & above (37.9%).

Instruments

In this study, a questionnaire was designed to collect data from participant. There were six sections in the questionnaires, which included the measurement of hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, social support, stress tolerance and the demographic variables.

Section A: This comprise of the demographic variables such as age, gender, marital status, educational status and length of service.

Section B: Hardiness Scale

Personality hardiness was measured using short hardiness scale developed by Paul (1995). A 12-item Likert type scale sample items include; "Trying my best at work makes a difference", "I know why I am doing what I am doing at work". Paul (1995) obtained a Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the total hardiness measure is .83. The present study had a Cronbach's alpha of 62.

Section C: Sensation Seeking Scale

The Sensation Seeking was measured using the Arnett Inventory of Sensation Seeking (AISS), developed by [40]. This had a 20 items with two subscales of 10 items each, Intensity and Novelty. Sample items include; "In general, I work better when I'm under pressure". The present study had the reliability of 66.

Section D: Social Support Scale

The multidimensional scale of perceived social support developed by Zimet et al. [53] was used to measure social support. The scale was design to reflect the perceived social support among the teachers. The scale had 12 items and was measure using a seven point Likert scale. Sample items include: "There is a special person who is around when I am in need. Zimet et al. [53] obtained a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of .84 to .92 based on the sample of the study. The present study had a Cronbach's alpha of 77.

Section E: Optimism Scale

The Life Orientation Test-Revised (LOT-R) developed by Scheier et al. [43] was used to measure optimism. The scale is a 10 items, rated on a five point Likert scale. Sample items include; "I'm always optimistic about my future"; "Overall, I expect more good things to happen to me than bad". Scheier et al. [43] obtained a Cronbach's coefficient alpha of 77. The present study obtained a Cronbach's alpha of 48.

Section F: Stress Tolerance Scale

The Stress Tolerance Questionnaire developed by First Generation @ Mohawk College (2011-12) was used to measure teachers stress tolerance level. While the overall study reliability tests produce a Cronbach's alpha of 85.

Data Analysis

The researcher used Pearson Product Moment Correlation (PPMC) to test hypothesis 1 in order to determine the direction of relationship among the study variables. Hypotheses 2 to 6 was analyse using Hierarchical multiple regression analysis in order to know the independent and joint prediction of hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism and social support on stress tolerance.

Results

Test of relationship among variables and test of hypothesis 1

The first analysis involved inter-correlations of all the variables of the study (Table 1).

Variable	1	2	3	4	5	6	7	8	9	10
1. Age	1									
2. Gender	-.03	1								
3. Marital Status	.66**	-.11	1							
4. Education Qualification	.30**	-.08	.47**	1						
5. Length of Service	.78**	.08	.62**	.11	1					
6. Hardiness	-.05	-.19**	-.07	-.01	-.10	1				
7. Social Support	.09	-.14*	.14*	-.11	.11	.31**	1			
8. Optimism	.04	.08	.10	-.02	.13*	-.28**	-.32**	1		
9. Sensation Seeking	.02	-.15*	.06	.02	.01	.12*	-.05	-.02	1	
10. Stress Tolerance	.11	.09	-.03	-.23**	.12*	-.01	.56**	-.31**	.09	1
Mean	37.57	-	-	-	2.72	21.20	64.03	21.57	44.70	52.32
Std. D.	11.29	-	-	-	1.16	4.68	9.22	5.42	5.04	11.71

Table 1: Correlation matrix showing the mean, sd and inter variable relationships among variables of the study.

The result in Table 1 showed that Education Qualification had a significant negative relationship with Stress Tolerance ($r(270) = -.23$; $p < 0.01$), Length of Service had a significant positive relationship with Stress Tolerance ($r(270) = .12$; $p < 0.05$), Optimism had a significant negative relationship with Stress Tolerance ($r(270) = -.31$; $p < 0.01$).

teachers ($r(270) = .56$; $p < 0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 1 which state that social support will have a significant positive relationship with stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

In order to test hypotheses 2, 3, 4, 5 and 6 hierarchical multiple regression analysis was conducted (Table 2).

Test of Hypotheses

Hypothesis 1

Results in Table 1 above showed that social support had a positive relationship with stress tolerance among private secondary school

Predictor variables	R	R ²	ΔR	F	B	t	P
Step 1	0.31	0.10	0.09	5.57	-	-	-
Age					0.22	2.14*	< 0.05
Gender					0.65	1.08	> 0.05
Marital Status					-0.52	-0.58	> 0.05
Education Qualification					0.27	-3.85**	< 0.01
Length of Service					0.01	0.10	> 0.05
Step 2	0.70	0.48	0.46	27.25	-	-	-
Hardiness					-0.24	-5.90**	< 0.01
Social Support					0.60	11.57**	< 0.01

Optimism					-0.18	-3.72**	< 0.01
Sensation Seeking					0.18	3.88**	< 0.01

Table 2: Summary of hierarchical multiple regression analysis showing the joint and independent contributions of the demographic variable, hardiness, social support, optimism and sensation seeking on stress tolerance.

Result in Table 2 above showed in step 1, that gender ($\beta=0.65$; $t=1.08$; $p>0.05$), marital status ($\beta=-0.52$; $t=-0.58$; $p>0.05$), and length of service ($\beta=0.01$; $t=0.10$; $p>0.05$) had no significant prediction on stress tolerance. Furthermore, age significantly predict stress tolerance ($\beta=0.22$; $t= 2.14$; $p<0.05$).

Test of hypothesis 2

Results in Table 2 above showed in step 1, that educational status significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=0.27$; $t=-3.85$; $p<0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 2 which state that educational status will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

Test of hypothesis 3

Results in Table 2 above showed in step 2, that hardiness significantly negatively predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=-0.24$; $t=-5.90$; $p<0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 3 which state that hardiness will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

Test of hypothesis 4

Results in Table 2 above showed in step 2, that sensation seeking significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=0.18$; $t=3.88$; $p<0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 4 which stated that sensation seeking will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

Test of hypothesis 5

Results in Table 2 above showed in step 2, that optimism significantly predicted stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers ($\beta=-0.18$; $t=-3.72$; $p<0.01$). Therefore, hypotheses 5 which stated that optimism will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

Test of hypothesis 6

Results in Table 2 above showed in step 2, on the joint contribution of all the independent variables to the prediction of stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers, the results indicated that all the independent variables when pulled together yield a multiple R of 0.70 and R^2 of 0.48 ($F(1, 268)=27.25$; $p<0.01$). This indicates that all the independent variables contributed 48% of the variance in stress tolerance. Meanwhile, other variables not considered in this study therefore accounts for 52%. Therefore hypothesis 6 which stated that hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support will have a

significant joint prediction on stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed and therefore accepted.

Discussion

This study investigated the extent to which hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism and social support predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers in Lagos State, Nigeria.

Hypothesis 1 which stated that social support will have a significant positive relationship with stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 1. This implies that those who reported high on social support show a high tendency towards stress tolerance and vice-versa. Also, teachers who received support from family, friends and co-workers tolerate stress more than the teacher who does not receive such help. This result was confirmed by the study of Caplan and Killelea [48] who consider social support to be significant when dealing with a stressful situation. Social support has shown to exert positive influence on dealing with stress [50].

Hypothesis 2 which stated that educational status will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 2, step 2. The result indicated that educational status significantly predicts stress tolerance. This implies that the higher the level of education the lower the level of stress tolerance and vice-versa. This is similar to the study of Mariya and Tahira [54] who examined the relationships of a set of independent variables (gender, qualification, teaching experience, salary, subjects taught and marital status) with occupational stress among secondary school teachers. According to the results of the analysis, nearly half of the secondary school teachers experience less stress towards their job and males display more occupational stress towards job than the females. Moreover, the trained graduate teachers are found to have higher occupational stress than post-graduate and untrained teachers.

Hypothesis 3 which stated that hardiness will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 2, step 2. The result indicated that hardiness significantly predicts stress tolerance. This implies that adjusting the way teachers tolerate with the stressful situations help them to convert stressful situations into opportunities for improving the performance, leadership, mental growth, and service in the teaching profession. This result is in line with the findings of Chan (2003) who assessed hardiness and stress among teachers and found that hardiness had significant impact on teachers' ability to tolerate stress. Gentry and Kobasa [52] and Kobasa [36] found out that hardiness has also been shown to be associated with the individual's use of active, problem-focused coping strategies for dealing with stressful events.

Hypothesis 4 which stated that sensation seeking will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 2, step 2. The result indicated that sensation seeking significantly predicts stress tolerance. This implies that the way teachers search for experiences and feelings that are

varied, novel, complex and intense and by the readiness to take physical, social, legal, and financial risks for the sake of such experiences help them in tolerating stress. This was confirmed by the study of Horvath and Zuckerman [55] who found out in their study using 447 undergraduate students and the results of the multiple regression analysis of the data showed that sensation-seeking was a strong predictor of stress tolerance.

Hypothesis 5 which stated that optimism will significantly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 2, step 2. The result indicated that optimism significantly predicts stress tolerance. This implies that teachers who are optimistic are able to tolerate stress than the pessimistic teachers. These findings supported past studies, for instance, Aspinwall and Taylor [24] who found out that optimist cope with stress in more adaptive ways than pessimists. Also this finding is similar to the work of Scheier et al. [43] who found a correlation between optimism and relatively good physical health in a sample of college students.

Hypothesis 6 which stated that hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support will significantly, jointly predict stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers was confirmed by the result in Table 2. This implies that teachers who are high in hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support have high tolerance for stressors on their job.

Conclusion

To this end, this study shows that hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism, and social support jointly predicts stress tolerance among private secondary school teachers. The contribution of conducting such research is to enable principals, management, and other people to make their effort in improving hardiness, sensation seeking, optimism and social support as a contributing factors to stress tolerance. Researching on these variables would allow educationist, professionals, parents, government and psychologist to design psychological intervention or programs that can enhance and encourage stress tolerance. Also management should provide support for the teachers.

Implication and Recommendation

A number of implications have emerged from the results of the present study. First, when a stressful situation arises in the workplace, preventive strategies can be infused by enhancing employees' internal resources [56-61]. Management should provide a conducive work environment for their employees as this will enable them to work efficiently and effectively. Employing more qualified teachers is a potential remedy for reducing workload, as this will lead to division of labour and reduces the number of courses taken by each teacher. Also, management should not set unrealistic goals for their employees. They should know their employees' limitation and the employees should not always aim for perfection.

Limitation

This study like other studies has some limitations. Firstly, only 272 respondents were involved in the study. This sample size was too small for generalization, which could merely provide illustrative and tentative results. Another important limitation in this study is that investigation of stress tolerance is limited to private secondary school

teachers alone. This did not allow for a comparison to be made across occupations.

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