

Psycho-cognitive Stress Management Approach for Enhanced Spousal Relationship within Families in Katsina State, Nigeria

Awo, O.K.

Kogi State College of Education (Technical)
Kabba, Kogi State

Abstract

The study focused on psycho-cognitive stress management approach for enhanced spousal relationship within families in Katsina State. Two research questions guided the study while two null hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study. The population of this study was the entire 986,453 spouses in Katsina State. Instrument for data collection was *Psycho-cognitive Spousal Stress Management Approach Questionnaire (PSSMAQ)*. Data were analyzed using mean and t-test. Findings include 17 psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress and 18 psycho-cognitive stress management approaches that can be adopted by spouses in Katsina State. There were no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of husbands and wives on the psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress and psycho-cognitive stress management approaches. It was recommended that: there should be periodic awareness campaign about causes of stress among spouses in the State and that there should be regular organizations of seminars and workshops by the government and concerned NGOs on psycho-cognitive stress management approaches and how spouses could be helped to adopt them for stress management in their homes.

Keywords: Spouse; Stress; Families; Psycho-cognitive; Relationship

Introduction

Spouses are two adult male and female that are legally married and maintain a socially approved sexual relationship (Ikulayo, 1999). Stinnett, Stinnett, Defrain and Defrain (2000) noted that spouses normally work and function together in unity to

continuously meet their needs and those of the family members. In their efforts to meet these needs, spouses are often confronted with various forms of challenges that make enormous demands on them. In the process of responding to the demands by members of the family, spouses

experience various forms of pressures, frustrations, tensions and anxieties, even conflicts which give rise to stress.

Stress is a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with opportunities, constraints or demands related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important (Robbins, 2009). Stress is a physical or psychological stimulus that can produce mental tension or physiological reactions that may lead to illness (Melin and Birch, 2005). In the opinion of Ezeilo (2005), stress could lead to family disintegration, separation or divorce, breakdown in productivity, sub-standard school performance of children, tense emotional atmosphere, mistrust, doubt, fear, sense of isolation, less feeling of closeness, sharing, intimacy, affection and impaired communication. Stress can cause a significant state of disequilibrium and disorganization which can lead to a discontinuity in the family's trajectory of functions. Nayak (2008), observed that stress occurs when the challenges of the spouses exceed their adjusting capacity or resources needed for management.

Stress management are appropriate coping actions, behaviours or attitudes which spouses exhibit when faced with certain psychological, physiological and social demands that tax their adaptive resources (Oboegbulem, 2010). It comprises various measures taken to cope with stress, so that a state of psychological and physiological

equilibrium is re-established and subsequently maintained. Cooper (1995) stated that the measures for coping with or managing stress could imply either altering the situation or altering one's perception of or adaptation to the situation. Thus, Cooper (1995) identified three basic ways of managing stress which include: eliminating or modifying the stress producing situations, removing the individual from the situation or allowing the individual to adjust to the situation personally and changing the situation to fit the individual concerned and strengthening the individual's personal resistance to stress. In the opinion of Clarke (1995), stress could be managed through social and personal engineering techniques, relaxation and other general techniques. Sharing a holistic view, Payne, Hahn and Mauer (2005) stated that spousal stress management strategies can be grouped into physical, communication, environmental, time management, social and psycho-cognitive.

Psycho-cognitive technique, according to Anderson (2010), involves mental processes such as attention, language use, memory, perception, problem solving, creativity and thinking. Papathanassoglou (2015) described psycho-cognitive approach of stress management to include relaxation, guided imagery, touch and cool music listening. Insel and Roth (2004) noted that psych-cognitive stress management strategies use both cognitive self talk and deep breathing approaches. Stress can be generated

from ideas, beliefs, perceptions, faulty conclusions, misinterpretations and expectation of worst things to happen. Deep breathing is a relaxation response which is characterized by a feeling of warmth and quiet mental alertness which is physical and psycho-cognitive in nature (Awo, 2013). The timely adoption of effective stress management approach by spouse is imperative due to the damaging effects of unmanaged stress condition.

The effects of unmanaged stress situations according to Koshiba and Helgerson (1999) include high blood pressure, aches and pains, internal heat, palpitation, poor memory, sleeplessness (insomania), poor appetite, lack of concentration, depression, fear, anxiety, anger, hostility and bad dreams. Maisamari (2002) stated further that physical stress can be accompanied by high blood pressure, digestive problem, ulcers and indigestion, palpitation, chest pain, skin disorder, muscle tension, headache, loss of appetite, restlessness, shutdown of menstrual cycle, impairment of fertility among males, depletion of vitamins C, B and D in the body, and in extreme cases, high blood pressure leading to stroke and death (Groiler, 2006). Sharing similar views, Azubuike (2005) and Maisamari (2002), submitted that the consequences of unmanaged stress could be manifested in unhealthy physiological, psychological and behavioural change. Psychological or mental stress may be accompanied by anger, anxiety, depression,

nervousness, irritability, tension and boredom.

Spousal stress is a common household phenomenon among families around the world, Nigeria inclusive. For instance, the observations in Katsina State, show that spouses are faced with numerous stress related challenges of poverty, unemployment, threat of insecurity such as the *Boko Haram* bombings and killings. Other challenges include inadequate financial resources to cater for their large family size (polygamous families), the demands of children education and upbringing, among others. These situations have led to the observed high cases of insomnia, depression, frustration, exhibition of maladaptive behaviours, drunkenness, illness and untimely death among spouses in the state which are signals of unmanaged stress condition. The maladaptive behaviours include excessive drinking of alcohol, smoking, nagging, withdrawal from partner and keeping late nights. These behaviours are unhealthy stress management approach. Hence, there is need to guide spouses in the state towards a more healthy stress management approach. It is based on this background that this study was conducted to identify psycho-cognitive stress management approach for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State, Nigeria.

Purpose of the Study

The major purpose of this study was to investigate psycho-cognitive stress management approach for peaceful

coexistence among spouses in Katsina State, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to:

1. Identify the psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State.
2. Determine psycho-cognitive stress management approach for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State.

Research Questions

Based on the specific purposes, the study answered the following research questions:

1. What are the psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State?
2. What are the psycho-cognitive stress management approaches for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State?

Hypotheses

The following null hypotheses were tested in this study at 0.05 level of significance.

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of literate spouses (male and female) on the psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State.

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of literate spouses (male and female) on the psycho-cognitive stress management approach for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State.

Methodology

Design of the study: Descriptive survey research design was adopted for the study.

Population for the Study: This was made up of literate husbands and wives (spouses) who live together in the urban and rural areas of Katsina State. They were married for at least five years or more. It was expected that the spouses must have had experiences of stress and its management.

Sample for the Study: A sample of 900 spouses (450 each of husbands and wives). Purposive, multistage and random sampling techniques were used in the drawing of the sample. In case of polygamous families, the first wives who are likely to ve stayed more in the marriage were selected.

Instrument for data collection: This was structured 35-item questionnaire titled: "Psycho-cognitive Spousal Stress Management Approach Questionnaire (PSSMAQ). The instrument was face-validated by four Home Economists and a medical doctor.

Cronbach Alpha reliability method was used to establish the reliability of the instrument. Reliability coefficient of 0.78 was obtained. Based on the geographical spread of the population across the State, six research assistants who were also key informants in compiling the list of literate spouses were hired for data collection while the researcher coordinated the activities of the six research assistants and collated the retrieved

questionnaire after two weeks of administration.

Data collection and analysis techniques: a total of the 900 copies of the questionnaire administered by hand, only 846 copies were completely filled and returned representing 94% return rate. The data collected were analyzed using means for answering the research questions while t-test was used in testing the null hypotheses at 0.05 level of probability. Mean value of 3.00 and above was used as basis for decision-making.

Results

Research Question One and Hypothesis One

What are the psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State?

H0₁: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of literate spouses (male and female) on the psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State.

The data for answering research question one and testing hypothesis one are presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Mean Ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Literature Spouses on Psycho-Cognitive Related Causes of Stress among Spouses in Katsina State

SN	Psycho-cognitive related causes of stress	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}_g	SD	p-value	Remarks
1	Persistent nagging by either/both the husband and wife.	4.49	4.42	4.46	0.72	0.45	A NS
2	Unbelief or lack of faith by either of the spouse	4.52	4.42	4.47	0.72	0.73	A NS
3	Comparing one's partner with others such as the friends or neighbour's partners.	4.23	4.26	4.25	0.96	0.35	A NS
4	Opposition to marriage from in-laws.	3.85	3.52	3.68	0.98	0.02	A S*
5	Lack of quality time to relax by either of the spouse	4.42	4.30	4.37	0.96	0.70	A NS
6	Father or mother in-laws/(parents) having dominant influence on husband or wife.	4.19	4.02	4.10	0.69	0.01	A S*
7	Pessimistic attitude of spouse	4.42	4.37	4.40	1.08	0.63	A NS
8	Marriage outside the same faith e.g Christian married to Muslim.	4.23	4.26	4.45	0.96	0.35	A NS
9	Unforgiving spirit of either of the spouse	4.52	4.49	4.51	1.04	0.33	A NS
10	Commitment of only one spouse to religious services and activities.	4.11	3.97	4.05	1.13	0.83	A NS
11	Spouses not praying together as a family.	4.30	4.23	4.27	0.85	0.21	A NS
12	Lack of time by spouse to meditate on family related issues	4.39	4.28	4.23	0.84	0.77	A NS

13	Incompatible religious doctrines e.g orthodox and Pentecostal or Islamic religious sects.	4.33	4.35	4.34	0.92	0.37	A	NS
14	Differences in depth of spirituality of spouses.	4.14	4.15	4.14	0.65	0.91	A	NS
15	Excessive surprise and nervousness by trouble or problems.	4.32	4.39	4.36	0.86	0.17	A	NS
16	The feelings of cultural dominance of men in decision making.	3.24	4.31	3.78	0.47	0.02	A	S*
17	Inability to accept mistakes easily and manage them with the family	4.28	4.27	4.28	0.59	0.66	A	NS

Key: \bar{X}_1 = Mean of Husband; \bar{X}_2 = Mean of Wives; \bar{X}_g = Overall mean; SD = Standard Deviation; No of the respondents = 846; A = Agreed, D = Disagreed; S* =significant; NS = Not Significant.

Table 1 on research question one reveals that the grand mean ratings of the responses of the respondents (spouses) on the 17 items ranged between 3.68 to 4.51 which are all greater than the cut-off point value of 3.00. This showed that the respondents (spouses) agreed that all the 17 items are psycho-cognitive related causes of stress among spouses in Katsina State. The standard deviation values for the entire 17 items in the table ranged between 0.68 to 1.08 indicating that the responses of the respondents are close to one another and to the mean.

Table 1 on hypothesis one shows that 14 out of the 17 items had their p-values ranged between 0.17 to 0.91 which are all greater than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there were no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of literate husbands and wives on the 14 psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress in Katsina State. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the two

groups of respondents is accepted on the 14 identified items. The p-values of the remaining 3 items in the table, that is items 4, 6 and 16 were 0.02, 0.01 and 0.02 respectively which are less than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there were significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of literate husbands and wives on the 3 psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress in Katsina State. Hence, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the two groups of respondents is rejected on the 3 items.

Research Question Two and Hypothesis Two

What are the psycho-cognitive stress management approaches for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State?

H0₂: There is no significant difference in the mean ratings of literate spouses (male and female) on the psycho-cognitive stress management approach for

peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State.

The data for answering research question one and testing hypothesis one are presented in Table 1.

Table 2: Mean Ratings and t-test Analysis of the Responses of Literate Spouses on Psycho-cognitive Stress Management Approach for Adoption by Spouses.

SN	Psycho-cognitive stress management approach	\bar{X}_1	\bar{X}_2	\bar{X}_g	SD	P-value	Remarks
1	Build faith in God	4.49	4.42	4.46	0.72	0.45	A NS
2	Relax by listening to music or watching appropriate television programmes	4.37	4.37	4.37	0.87	0.23	A NS
3	Make adjustment to cope with pleasant and unpleasant situations	4.47	4.47	4.47	0.84	0.64	A NS
4	Regular practice of meditation by focusing at a pleasant event.	3.71	4.05	3.88	0.89	0.01	A S*
5	Use of biofeedback machine/gadgets assist spouses to cope with stress.	4.47	4.45	4.46	0.68	0.40	A NS
6	Be optimistic always about family related issues.	4.80	4.78	4.79	0.46	0.75	A NS
7	Share wealth and talent with spouse and others in the family.	4.42	4.37	4.40	1.08	0.63	A NS
8	Accept mistakes easily and manage them with the family.	4.76	4.79	4.77	0.61	0.67	A NS
9	Practice forgiveness	4.49	4.42	4.46	0.72	0.47	A NS
10	Spend a few minutes each day in meditation on family related issues	4.37	4.37	4.37	0.87	0.64	A NS
11	Get the right perspective of a problem or an issue by discussing with spouse.	4.47	4.47	4.47	0.83	0.91	A NS
12	Create an impression that most family problems are temporary and manageable.	4.16	4.02	4.09	1.00	0.36	A NS
13	Remind yourself that you have managed problems with your spouse successfully before.	3.92	3.92	3.93	0.72	0.22	A NS
14	Keep a list of lifetime accomplishments close and reflect over them.	4.12	4.02	4.08	0.83	0.87	A NS
15	Practice positive thinking	4.17	4.04	4.11	0.89	0.25	A NS
16	Develop the habit of not being surprised or worried by trouble or problems.	4.20	4.25	4.23	0.84	0.85	A NS
17	Adopt filtering method by paying attention to the positive and disregarding the negative situations.	4.22	4.36	4.29	0.71	0.87	A NS
18	Develop and leave a life full of meaning and purpose with spouse.	4.23	4.32	4.28	0.94	0.31	A NS

Key: \bar{X}_1 = Mean of Husband; \bar{X}_2 = Mean of Wives; \bar{X}_g = Overall mean; SD = Standard Deviation; No of the respondents = 846; A = Agreed, D = Disagreed; S* =significant; NS = Not Significant.

Table 2 on research question two shows that the grand mean ratings of the responses of the respondents (spouses) on the 18 items ranged between 3.88 to 4.79 which are all greater than the cut-off point value of 3.00. This showed that the respondents (spouses) agreed that all the 18 items are psycho-cognitive stress management approaches that could be adopted by spouses in Katsina State. The standard deviation values for the 18 items in the table ranged between 0.46 to 1.08 indicating that the responses of the respondents are close to one another and to the mean.

Data presented in Table 2 on hypothesis two shows that 17 out of the 18 items had their p-values ranged between 0.25 to 0.87 which are all greater than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there were no significant differences in the mean ratings of the responses of literate husbands and wives on the 17 psycho-cognitive stress management approaches that could be adopted by spouses in Katsina State. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the two groups of respondents is accepted on the 17 identified items. The p-values of the remaining 1 item in the table, that is item 4 was 0.01 which was less than 0.05 level of significance. This indicated that there was significant difference in the mean ratings of the

responses of literate husbands and wives on item 4. Therefore, the null hypothesis of no significant difference in the mean ratings of the responses of the two groups of respondents is rejected on item 4 in the table.

Discussion of Results

The findings of this study showed that the major psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress in Katsina State include: persistent nagging by either/both the husband and wife, unbelief or lack of faith by either of the spouse, comparing one's partner with others such as the friends or neighbour's partners, opposition to marriage from in-laws, pessimistic attitude of spouse, unforgiving spirit of either of the spouse, spouses not praying together as a family, lack of time by spouse to meditate on family related issues and incompatible religious doctrines e.g orthodox and Pentecostal or Islamic religious sects. The findings of this study conformity with the findings of Angadi (2008) who studied emotional intelligence and stressors among working couples and found out that spousal level of intimacy, unbelief or lack of faith by either of the spouse, pessimistic attitude of spouse, relationship with extended families and child related issues are the major causes of stress among families. The findings of the study also agreed with that of Chechet (2011) who carried out a study on

sources and management strategies of stress among female workers in Zaria metropolis in Kaduna State and found out that religious differences, traffic congestion, opposition to marriage from in-laws, pessimistic attitude, conflict at home and noise causes stress among people.

The findings of this study as regards psycho-cognitive stress management approaches showed that the respondents (spouses) agreed that building faith in God, relaxing by listening to music or watching appropriate television programmes, making adjustment to cope with pleasant and unpleasant situations, regular practice of meditation by focusing at a pleasant event, using biofeedback machine/gadgets assist spouses to cope with stress, being optimistic always about family related issues, sharing wealth and talent with spouse and others in the families, practicing forgiveness, getting the right perspective of a problem or an issue by discussing with spouse and practicing positive thinking among others could be adopted by spouses to manage stress. The findings of this study supported that of Nayak (2008) who investigated stress management strategies among teachers and found out that stress management techniques such as offering prayer to God, positive thinking, working in-group, avoiding painful reminders, delegating tasks and listening to songs were practiced to manage mental stress. The findings of this study also agreed with the findings of Chechet (2011) who found out that labour

saving devices and listening to soft music are all significantly correlated to stress management strategies. The findings of this study is in support of that of Ballesteros and Whitlock (2010) who found out that taking a walk, playing a video game, taking a bath and having a quiet time to meditate in a conducive environment are effective stress management strategies. Oboegbulem (2002) reported that strategies such as medication, deep breathing exercises, watching television and video could help to significantly reduce stress between spouses.

Conclusion

Spousal stress has become a common household problem in all human societies. The case of spouses in Nigeria and Katsina state in particular is not an exemption. Spouses in Katsina state are faced with numerous stress related challenges such as the issue of social and religious crisis, insufficient financial resources to cater for family responsibilities among others. These issues result into spousal stress and have negative implications on family's health, trajectory functions, harmony and productivity. Such negative health consequences may include chronic blood pressure which can lead to death, anxiety, depression, sleeplessness (insomamia), absenteeism, hostility, psychosis, aches and pains among many others. This calls for the need to properly manage spousal stress using psycho-cognitive approach to enhance marital wellbeing and family cohesion. It was

based on this yardstick that this study was carried out to identify psycho-cognitive stress management approach for peaceful coexistence among spouses in Katsina State, Nigeria. Based on the data collected and analysed, the study identified 17 psycho-cognitive related causes of spousal stress and 18 psycho-cognitive stress management approaches that can be adopted by spouses in Katsina State.

Recommendations

1. There should be periodic awareness campaign about causes of stress among spouses in the State through proactive effort of local and state government at both urban and rural areas of the state.
2. There should be regular organizations of seminars and workshops by the government and concerned NGOs on psycho-cognitive stress management approaches and how spouses could be helped to adopt them for stress management in their homes.

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