



## Survey of occupational stress among urban school librarians in Nigeria

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### Abstract

Occupational stress is becoming increasingly common in all categories of workers. Due to the overwhelming demands of library customers, librarians are likely to suffer occupational stress as well. The objective of this study is to assess the occupational stress of urban school librarians in selected Nigerian public secondary schools. A descriptive survey was conducted and the Occupational Stress Scale (OSS) was used to collect data from 75 urban secondary school Librarians in South-East Nigeria. Means, standard deviations, and analysis of variance were used to analyze the results. Findings suggested that male and female secondary school librarians in the sampled urban secondary schools felt similarly about their occupation's level of stress. In addition, urban school librarians with bachelor's degrees reported higher levels of occupational stress. Another finding showed that urban school librarians who are married showed more occupational stress than those who are single, separated/divorced and widowed. Moreover, no significant differences were found between urban secondary school librarians who worked in mixed or single sex schools for occupational stress. In conclusion, occupational stress is present among urban school librarians in Nigerian public secondary schools. It was recommended that stress management interventions should be tailored to assist these school librarians in managing their level of stress.

**Keywords:** Occupational stress, urban school librarians, South Eastern Nigeria.

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## Introduction

As humans, we are subjected to stress because of the complexities of life in both rural and urban settings. Virtually every aspect of the job environment can produce stress. Workers are constantly faced with difficulties or painful experiences, which creates stress and significantly reduces productivity (Bickford, 2005). Occupational stress has been found to be one of the leading causes of premature death around the world (Wilkinson, & Marmot, 2003). Occupational stress is contributing to conditions of overwork, job insecurity, low job satisfaction, and a lack of autonomy as a result of the current state of global economies (Bickford, 2005). Studies have shown that occupational stress impedes employees' productivity and profitability, as well as their health and well-being (Suleman, Hussain, Shehzad, Syed, and Raja, 2018). As a result, clinical and health psychologists are increasingly involved in identifying high risk group members, either informally through direct contact with primary care physicians (Banjoko, Iwuji & Bagshaw, 2012) or formally through preventive programs (Kirk & Brown, 2003).

A definition of job stress provided by the US Department of Health and Human Services (NIOSH, 2007) is the physical and psychological reaction to demands of the job that does not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. There is a potential link between occupational stress and poor health. An occupational situation is stressful when the environment in which a person works does not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the workers (Sieber, et al, 1996). Malik (2011) explains that occupational stress results from the interaction between people and their jobs and is characterized by internal conflicts that undermine each person's ability to function normally. According to Nikolaou and Tsaousis (2002), occupational stress is closely associated with the commitment of an individual to an organization as well as their physical and psychological wellbeing. The American Institute of Stress (2022) report on workplace stress identifies several factors that

contribute to workplace stress, including long working hours, feeling unfairly treated at work, inadequate recognition and rewards for good work, lack of job security, and pressure to complete tasks without appropriate authority or resources.

Due to the overwhelming demands of library customers, librarians are likely to suffer occupational stress as well (Wilkins, 2014). In secondary school, librarians experience stress, and if unmanaged, it can invariably lead to less work output as well as poor services, resulting in frustrated users (Ilo, 2016). Researchers have cited a variety of reasons as occupational stress triggers. A stressor can be physical, social or psychological (Birkett, 2011). In a study conducted by Hyme, et al (2011), environmental factors accounted for about 40.5% of responses, while 10.5% of respondents felt stressed due to work overload. While researchers have in recent times studied different sources of occupational stress, librarians have received little attention. Despite being difficult to explain, the low level of research may be attributed to the belief that academic librarians are untasked (Angelica, 2018). The profession of librarianship has been known to have inherent stress over the years, and librarians have regularly provided information on how to recognize, prevent, and cope with occupational stress (Jordan, 2014). This study examined occupational stress among urban school librarians in southeastern Nigeria.

### Objectives

The general objective of this study is to assess the occupational stress of urban school librarians in selected Nigerian public secondary schools. Specifically, the study sought to find out.

1. The mean difference in level of stress of male and female school librarians.
2. The mean difference in level of stress between mixed secondary school librarians and single-sex secondary school librarians.

### Hypothesis

1. There is no significant mean difference in level of stress of male and female school librarians.
2. There is no significant difference in level of stress between mixed secondary school librarians and single-sex secondary school librarians.

### Method

A descriptive survey was conducted on 75 school librarians randomly selected from urban secondary schools in Southeast Nigeria. A simple random selection method was used to pick (25 males and 50 females) librarians. The faculty of education research ethics committee of the University of Nigeria approved this study. All the librarians who participated in this study provided informed consent. The Occupation Stress Scale (OSS) developed by Chen, Wong and Yu (2001) was used to collect data. The OSS contained 51 items, and covered six domains (factors intrinsic to the job, career and achievement, relating to others at work, safety, manager's role, and the interface between work and family life). The OSS is a 6 point Likert scale ranging from 1 (indicating no stress) to 6 (indicating high stress). Participants were asked to select the option that best described and represented their stress sources. Two research assistants assisted with the administration and retrieval of the OSS to the targeted group. All administered instruments were retrieved on the spot to minimize loss. All 75 questionnaires were filled out and returned, representing a 100% return rate. The research questions were answered with mean and standard deviation, while the hypotheses were tested with analysis of variance (F-test) at a significance level of 0.05.

### Results and Discussion

**Table 1:** Descriptive statistics for occupational stress of urban secondary school librarians

Gender	Qualification	Marital status	School type	N	Mean	SD
Male	Master's	Married	Single Sex	4	3.11	0.41
			Total	4	3.11	0.41
		Single	Single Sex	4	2.98	0.09
			Total	4	2.98	0.09
	Bachelors	Married	Single Sex	4	3.69	0.31
			Total	4	3.69	0.31
		Single	Single Sex	4	2.98	0.09
			Total	4	2.98	0.09

Gender	Qualification	Marital status	School type	N	Mean	SD		
Female	Total	Single	Single Sex	6	3.26	0.23		
			Total	6	3.26	0.23		
		Widowed	Single Sex	2	2.84	0.06		
			Total	2	2.84	0.06		
		Total	Single Sex	12	3.34	0.38		
			Total	12	3.34	0.38		
		Married	Single Sex	8	3.39	0.46		
			Total	8	3.39	0.46		
		Single	Single Sex	10	3.15	0.23		
			Total	10	3.15	0.23		
		Widowed	Single Sex	2	2.84	0.06		
			Total	2	2.84	0.06		
		Total	Single Sex	20	3.22	0.37		
			Total	20	3.22	0.37		
		Master's	Married	Single Sex	1	3.22	0.00	
				Mixed	5	2.99	0.09	
				Total	6	3.03	0.13	
				Divorced/Separated	Mixed	1	2.84	0.00
					Total	1	2.84	0.00
				Total	Single Sex	1	3.22	0.00
			Mixed	6	2.97	0.11		
			Total	7	3.00	0.13		
			Bachelors	Married	Single Sex	4	3.17	0.07
					Mixed	16	3.29	0.29
	Total				20	3.26	0.27	
	Single				Single Sex	5	3.39	0.15
		Mixed			12	3.28	0.18	
	Total	17			3.31	0.17		
	Divorced/Separated	Mixed		9	3.25	0.28		
		Total		9	3.25	0.28		
	Widowed	Mixed		2	2.95	0.01		
		Total		2	2.95	0.01		
	Total	Single Sex		9	3.29	0.17		
	Mixed	39		3.26	0.26			
	Total	48	3.26	0.24				
	Total	Married	Single Sex	5	3.18	0.06		
			Mixed	21	3.22	0.29		
			Total	26	3.21	0.26		

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Gender	Qualification	Marital status	School type	N	Mean	SD	
<b>Total</b>		Single	Single Sex	5	3.39	0.15	
			Mixed	12	3.28	0.18	
			Total	17	3.31	0.17	
		Divorced/Separated	Mixed	10	3.21	0.29	
			Total	10	3.21	0.29	
		Widowed	Mixed	2	2.95	0.01	
			Total	2	2.95	0.01	
		Total	Single Sex	10	3.28	0.16	
			Mixed	45	3.22	0.26	
			Total	55	3.23	0.25	
		Master's	Married	Single Sex	5	3.13	0.36
				Mixed	5	2.99	0.09
				Total	10	3.06	0.26
			Single	Single Sex	4	2.98	0.09
				Total	4	2.98	0.09
	Divorced/Separated		Mixed	1	2.84	0.00	
			Total	1	2.84	0.00	
	Total		Single Sex	9	3.06	0.27	
			Mixed	6	2.97	0.11	
			Total	15	3.02	0.22	
	Bachelors		Married	Single Sex	8	3.43	0.35
				Mixed	16	3.29	0.29
		Total		24	3.33	0.31	
		Single	Single Sex	11	3.32	0.20	
			Mixed	12	3.28	0.18	
			Total	23	3.29	0.19	
		Divorced/Separated	Mixed	9	3.25	0.28	
Total			9	3.25	0.28		
Widowed		Single Sex	2	2.84	0.06		
		Mixed	2	2.95	0.01		
		Total	4	2.89	0.07		
Total		Single Sex	21	3.32	0.30		
		Mixed	39	3.26	0.26		
		Total	60	3.28	0.27		
Total		Married	Single Sex	13	3.31	0.37	
	Mixed		21	3.22	0.29		
	Total		34	3.25	0.32		
	Single	Single Sex	15	3.23	0.24		

Gender	Qualification	Marital status	School type	N	Mean	SD
			Mixed	12	3.28	0.18
			Total	27	3.25	0.21
		Divorced/Separated	Mixed	10	3.21	0.29
			Total	10	3.21	0.29
		Widowed	Single Sex	2	2.84	0.06
			Mixed	2	2.95	0.01
			Total	4	2.89	0.07
		Total	Single Sex	30	3.24	0.31
			Mixed	45	3.22	0.26
			Total	75	3.23	0.28

The result in Table 1 revealed the mean occupational stress scores of urban school librarians. It demonstrates a close range in occupational stress level experienced by male and female librarians. As indicated by standard deviation scores, male and female librarians in the sampled urban secondary schools did not feel differently about their occupational stress. The result in Table 1 also shows a mean difference in occupational stress of urban secondary school librarians between bachelor's and master's degree holders, with bachelor's degree holders demonstrating slightly higher level of occupational stress than master's degree holders. The standard deviation scores suggest that librarians with bachelor's degree and those with master's degree from the sampled urban secondary schools had slightly differing rate about their occupational stress level.

Also, result in Table 1 showing the mean scores of occupational stress of urban school librarians in respect to their marital status revealed married, single, divorced/separated and widowed. This shows urban school librarians that are married showed higher level of occupational stress with mean and standard deviation scores compared to urban school librarians that are widowed, divorced/separated and single. As shown in Table 1, urban secondary school librarians from single sex or mixed schools had similar opinions about their occupational stress level. The overall OSS score and the standard deviation among urban secondary school librarians suggest that they have moderate occupational stress level.

**Table 2.** F-test analysis for mean difference between male and female librarians' occupational stress

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OSS * Gender	Between Groups	(Combined)	.002	1	.002	.030	.864
	Within Groups		5.789	73	.079		
	Total		5.791	74			

The F-test analysis in Table 2 compares the mean difference between male and female librarians' occupational stress. An F-value of 0.30 with degrees of freedom 1,73 and a significance level of .864 were obtained. Consequently, the results revealed that there was no significant mean difference between male and female urban secondary school librarians in terms of occupational stress ( $F(1,73)=.030, p=.864$ ). In this sense, the null hypothesis, which asserts that there is no significant difference between male and female urban secondary school librarians in terms of occupational stress, is accepted.

**Table 3.** F-test analysis for mean difference in occupational stress of urban secondary school librarians with bachelors and masters degrees

			Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OSS * Qualification	Between Groups	(Combined)	.776	1	.776	11.291	.001
	Within Groups		5.015	73	.069		
	Total		5.791	74			

An F-test is used in Table 3 to analyze the mean difference between master's and bachelor's degree holders among urban secondary school librarians in terms of their occupational stress level. The F-value was 11.291 with 1, 73 degrees of freedom and a significant value of 0.001. Therefore, the results indicated that there was a significant difference in occupational stress level between master's and bachelor's degree holders among urban secondary school librarians, with bachelor's degree holders demonstrating more occupational stress level ( $F(1,73)=11.291, p=0.001$ ). Therefore, the null hypothesis, that there is no significant difference in occupational stress between master's and bachelor's degree holders, is rejected.

**Table 4:** F-test analysis for mean difference in occupational stress of urban secondary school librarians by marital status

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OSS * Marital status	Between Groups (Combined)	.478	3	.159	2.130	.104
	Within Groups	5.313	71	.075		
	Total	5.791	74			

Based on the F-test analysis, result in Table 4 shows the mean scores of occupational stress of urban school librarians in respect to their marital status. There was an F-value of 2.130 with degrees of freedom 3, 71 and a significant value of .104. As such, the results suggest that the level of occupational stress of urban school Librarians in respect to their marital status was not significantly different ( $F(3,71)=2.130, p=.104$ ). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted that the level of occupational stress of urban school librarians in respect to their marital status.

**Table 5:** F-test analysis for mean difference in occupational stress of urban secondary school librarians in single sex and mixed school type

		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
OSS * School Type	Between Groups (Combined)	.008	1	.008	.095	.758
	Within Groups	5.783	73	.079		
	Total	5.791	74			

Based on the F-test analysis, Table 5 shows the mean level of occupational stress among urban secondary school librarians in single sex and mixed school type. There was an F-value of .095 with degrees of freedom 1, 73 and a significant value of .758. As such, the results suggest that the level of occupational stress among urban secondary school librarians was not significantly different by school type ( $F(1, 73) = .095, p=.758$ ). The null hypothesis is therefore accepted that the level of occupational stress among urban secondary school librarians is not significantly different in single sex and mixed school type.

## Discussion

The general objective of this study is to assess the level of occupational stress among urban school librarians in selected Nigerian public secondary schools. According to the study, male and female school librarians in the sampled urban secondary schools did not feel differently about their occupational stress levels. Thus, there was no significant difference in occupational stress levels between male and female secondary school librarians in urban areas. This finding supports the previous findings of McCarty et al. (2007) who revealed that even though there are similar trigger of occupational stress among male and female, male and female workers did not report significant different levels of occupational stress. In a similar vein, Swanson, Power and Simpson (1998) in their study revealed that there was no significant gender difference in the occupational stress level of their studied participants and further stated that occupational stress were significantly related to increased role complexity. This finding is further upheld by Archibong, Bassey and Effiom (2010) who attributed gender difference in occupational stress to the interface between the official workload of female workers and managing their homes. According to Tung (2018), female workers experienced substantially lower levels of self-perceived occupational stress than their male counterparts while Antoniou, Davidson and Cooper (2003) in their study found significant differences between male and female levels of occupational stress with female demonstrating a significant higher level than their male counterparts.

Also, the finding of this study revealed that urban secondary school librarians with bachelor's degree and those with master's degree from the sampled urban secondary schools had slightly differing rate about their occupational stress level. Therefore, the results indicated that there was a significant difference in occupational

stress level between master's and bachelor's degree holders among urban secondary school librarians, with bachelor's degree holders demonstrating more occupational stress. This finding is similar to that of Yang, Wang and Jin (2006) who opined that workers with lower qualification experience higher level of stress on the job. The study also found out that, urban school librarians that are married showed higher level of occupational stress compared to urban school librarians that are widowed, divorced/separated and single. As such, the results suggest that the level of occupational stress of urban school librarians in respect to their marital status was not significantly different. According Michael, et al. (2009), married women demonstrated a significant higher occupational stress level than their unmarried counterparts'. This reason is upheld due to the demanding nature of family caring which is reasonably on the woman's shoulder. On the other hand, Zhao, He, Lovrich, and Cancino (2003) revealed that marital status inserts marginal effect on occupational stress. The authors further stated that married men and women were found to be experiencing a higher level of occupational stress than their unmarried colleagues. Also, according to Salim, Shams, Zidan, and Aboal (2019), stated that the multifaceted stress of married working women with responsibilities at various arenas may be the reason for their higher level of occupational stress. In addition, the study found out that urban secondary school librarians from single sex or mixed schools had similar opinions about their occupational stress level. As such, the results suggest that the level of occupational stress among urban secondary school librarians was not significantly different by school type (mixed or single sex school). Accordingly, it was recommended that stress management interventions should be tailored to the specific needs of those school librarians who are experiencing high levels of stress.

## Conclusion

In conclusion, occupational stress was shown to be a critical workplace issue for males and females within the secondary school library workforce. Therefore, school authorities should make a concerted effort to reduce librarians' stress at work through effective policy implementation and best workplace practices. The current results should be validated with other samples, if possible, and with other measures of occupational stress in order to gain a more concrete insight into the issue.

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