

# Stress Control and Management among Nigerian Journalists

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**ABSTRACT---** *Stress in one's imagination is a characteristic of modern living. Every individual experiences stress in one form or another; be it in our personal relationship, at school, at work or in just trying to make ends meet, stress has remain with us. It is not an understatement to say that stress is a predominant phenomenon of the media organizations. Perhaps nowhere else has it been so glaring, more diffused and better reinforced as in the media houses.*

*In the day-to-day dissemination of news and information, the media practitioners are confronted with stressful situations which often times result in bodily harm hence the need to contribute towards managing the unfortunate development.*

*This paper discusses causes of stress, types of stress, signs and symptoms, stress and health, coping with stress, stress and job performance, among others. It concludes with methods of managing stress as a solution towards preventing health-related illnesses like cardio-vascular disorders, stroke and ulcer. Recommendations on how to control and manage stressful conditions were advanced in order to avail journalists, broadcasters etc. the knowledge to combat the menace. It is hoped other professionals will find the contents of this research work useful as well.*

**Keywords---** stress, media organizations, media practitioners, health-related illness

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## 1. INTRODUCTION

Throughout history, stress has been one of those things that everyone has experienced but few can define. The issue of stress is not new among individuals of different race and as long as man continues to exist in the universe, stress shall remain part and parcel of Homo-Sapiens's existence. To explain its importance, stress has been severally discussed in psychology, medicine, education and in the social sciences. Research works conducted in this area of study have proffered solutions on ways of preventing, reducing, controlling and managing stressful conditions, but the stressors still prevail.

Stress manifests in different forms. To the motorist stuck in a traffic jam, it can be the hassles of heavy traffic and an overheating car; whilst to the student it can be the pressure of an impending examination. A journalist saddled with hunting for news and editing same is not far from the claws of stress. In the same vein, to the textbook writer, it can be the threat of deadlines and malfunctioning computers.

Most people see stress as a destructive, disabling force, but not all stress is negative. The word eustress has been coined to describe the kind of positive stress one might experience as a result of an exhilarating event. It is the type of stress an individual is likely to experience on passing a driving test, complete his degree examination or win a fortune on the National Lottery. Negative stress, on the other hand, is distress. It is the stress of losing, falling, or simply not coping. We all experience distress from time to time. In fact, stress is an unavoidable consequence of life.

As mortals, regardless of how sensible, intelligent or privilege we are, we will be challenged at times by frustrations, losses, changes and conflicts. Stress comes from both negative and positive events. In other words. It is as inescapable as death and taxes. Lahey (2003) observed that a certain amount of stress is probably healthy as it energises us and challenges us to grow. He stated that stress is generally experienced as an uncomfortable, unhealthy force that most of us would be happier without.

How do Nigerian journalists perceive stress? This question becomes pertinent in view of the poor lifestyle which many of them embrace. Generally speaking, not a few journalists engage in variety of pattern of behavior that promotes poor health. Due to the nature of their work, a good population of these journalists have cultivated the habit of heavy consumption of alcohol, excessive smoking and dating women. Bad habits are difficult to break! They hardly spare time for exercises hence it is not uncommon to see protruding bellied male journalists at media functions.

At the primary level, the kind of stress caused by these bad health habits may lead to loss of concentration, forgetfulness, inability to sleep (insomnia) and nightmares. If the situation is not promptly arrested at this stage, the

effects of stress may become more severe and more intense. This phenomenon, according to Adeyeye (2007) places the human body under physical or psychological stress thereby increasing the production of certain hormones such as adrenaline and cortisol. These hormones produce marked changes in heart rate, blood pressure level, metabolism and physical activity.

## 2. CONCEPT OF STRESS

Stress is not a new concept. Akeredolu and Adeogun (2001) citing Hans Selye (1976) defines stress as the state which results when any external action, situation or event places special physical and/or psychological demand on a person, to cause an adaptive response which varies from one individual to another. Hans Selye, an endocrinologist was regarded as the father of modern stress concept and devoted his entire life to the study of stress. He stumbled onto his study of stress by accident, in the course of his study of a new hormone. The process of his experiments was the injection of a strange chemical into rats and later found that three major effects were always the result:-

1. Enlargement of the adrenal cortex,
2. Shrinking of the thymus, spleen, lymph nodes and lymphocytes in the blood, and
3. Bleeding deep ulcers in the lining of the stomach and the duodenum.

Following this discovery, Selye coined the word ‘stress’ to represent syndrome. According to Udoh (2001), stress has been described as any stimulus that interferes with the biological or psychological equilibrium of an organism. In other words, it is a stimulus, which strains both the physiological and psychological capacities of an organism. Simply put, it is a set of circumstances under which an individual cannot respond or perform adequately or can do so only at the cost of excessive wear and tear of his emotional and physical system.

Considering the way stress is explained, one would think that it is a completely bad phenomenon. This is not so, as certain amount of stress is necessary for health and success in work. Stress can thus be positive and strengthening for a person (Udoh, 2001) citing Selye (1976). High achiever managers and top executive in spite of the seemingly positive nature of stress (which may have propelled them to achieve success), tend to be bombarded with higher than average amount of stress arising from job pressures. Job pressures can cause both physical and psychological disturbances of severe proportions. When stress is such that threatens an individual in some manner, the situation produces disturbances in behaviour and in such a person’s inner experience.

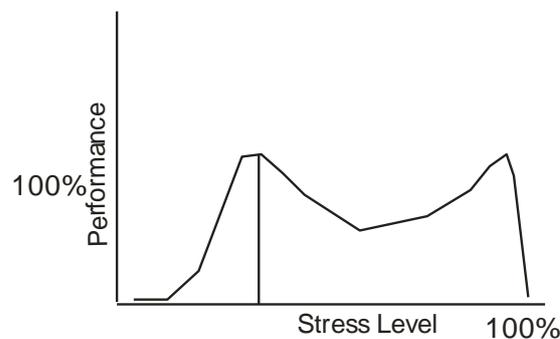
In general sense, stress is the pressure people feel in life due to their reaction to situation. However, individual differences account for a wide range of reactions to situations and, in turn, to stress. For example, a task viewed as challenging by one person may produce high level of anxiety or stress in another.

## 3. NATURE OF STRESS

Beehr and Newman (1978) as cited by Khanka (2007) viewed stress as a condition arising from the interaction of people and their jobs and characterized by changes within people that force them to deviate from their normal functioning. This side of stress is called distress. There is also a positive side of stress called eustress. Eustress refers to the healthy, positive, constructive outcome of stressful events and the stress response. Eustress is the stress experience that activates and motivates people to achieve their goals and succeed in their life’s challenges. This means that people need some stress to survive. This is why Hans Selye views stress as the spice of life and absence of stress as death. It is however worth mentioning that the negative side of stress i.e. distress which has attracted much attention and concern as it adversely affects that employees’ mental and physical health and, in turn, their performances.

The nature of stress varies in intensity, source and type

- a) **Intensity**:- Scientifically, it has been proved that a certain level or intensity is needed for an individual’s daily activity between stress and performance level as shown in the curvilinear graph below.



Source: Akeredolu, W and Adeogun, F (2001)

The above graph shows that a certain level of stress is required for a person to perform optimally at a particular activity and further increase of this level will be counter effective. With this graph in mind, stress may be classified as

negative and positive, as earlier stated. A negative effect of stress can be described as a feeling of anxiety, frustration, anger and pain. When it carries a positive effect, it portrays a feeling of elation, euphoria or happiness, which could place a lot of tension on the body system, especially on the cardiovascular system (heart and blood vessels).

Other kinds of stress are hypostress and hyperstress. Hypostress is a feeling of boredom due to lack of situation thus featuring a state of low morale as well as little or no drive. On the other hand, hyperstress is a state of over stimulation and manifests as hyperactivity, nervousness, poor attention span, uncontrolled excitement and over-anxiety, which may result in systematic failure.

b) **Source:-** Stress resulting from source may be classified as competitive and environmental stress. The former manifests among peers and working colleagues. The desire to excel above the other could be very strong in an individual to the point of overtaking the ability to achieve the self-imposed target of achievement. This desire to excel above others puts pressure/stress on the individual. Environmental stress could be the stress resulting from the environment. The Nigerian environment is generally stress prone. Issues like political uncertainty, economic instability with poor remuneration, poor transport system, poor health care delivery, pollution of various types e.t.c constitute environmental stressors.

c) **Type:-** Three types are identified – acute, chronic and traumatic stress. Acute stress results from unpleasant situations that need to be resolved. It is usually short-lived and when this type of stress occurs too frequently in the life of an individual, it may lead to acute psychosomatic (body-mind) breakdown known as burn out. This is usually seen in young executive whiz kids from whom a lot is expected. Chronic stress can result from long-standing problem, which may be domestic or work related such as unstable marriage, poor interpersonal relationship with a boss or subordinate at work. Traumatic stress occurs as a result of a major disaster or tragedy in the individuals' life. If the stress of this magnitude occurs in childhood, it may permanently affect the brain circuit.

#### SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

Pressure in one's life resulting from stress, if it persists and becomes excessive, could culminate to strain and in turn adversely affects a person's physique, psychology and behavior. In reaction, the body prepares itself for "fight" or "flight". The excessive stress develops various symptoms that harm the inability to cope with the environment. The various symptoms of stress are diagrammatically presented below.



Source: Khanka, S.S (2007)

For the convenience of this study, the various symptoms of stress can be classified into three broad categories viz:

- (1) Psychosomatic                      (2) Psychological and                      (3) Behavioural

**Psychosomatics:** The psychosomatic symptoms of stress are bodily or physical for which the causes are mental. Research studies have revealed that a number of physical complaints like ulcer, headaches, chest pains, constipation, bronchial asthma e,t,c are emotional induced (Khanka 2007).

In actual sense, digestive problems may also be psychosomatic. The immediate response to stress include slowing down the digestive process, which may cause nausea, vomiting, diarrhea and constipation (Akeredolu et al,

2001). Also, ulcer and an illness associated with a hole or sore in the lining of the stomach or other parts of the digestive system is equally a digestive ailment often stress-connected.

**Psychological:** A relationship manifests between stress and emotional disorders. Stress, according to Research study carried out by Dua, as reported by Khanka (2007) gets its reflection in the form of anxiety, depression, helplessness, hopelessness and anger. The stressful people with slightest provocation are easily induced to anger and anxiety and are unable to relax. In his study, Dua reports that the employees suffering from occupational stress generally tend to have low psychological commitment to the organization.

**Behavioural:** Job stress also bears behavioural symptoms which are easily observable. High degree of job stress drives people to easily adopt certain visible behavioural symptoms such as sleeplessness, excessive drinking, smoking, absenteeism, obesity and gluttony. Also, job stress can lead to less visible behavioural symptoms in the form of bad decision-making, negative internal politics, reduced creativity, apathy and so on.

#### 4. CAUSES OF STRESS

Stress can arise through two channels viz: external and internal. Situations such as our environment, jobs, families, religious etc are external causes of stress while the other primary source is dependent on our state of physical and mental health that is internal to us. The external causes of stress are traumatic experiences, stressful events, day-to-day frustrations and physical and social environment.

Oyerinde (2004) identified two factors that are responsible for the traumatic experiences namely: natural catastrophes like earthquakes, hurricanes, floods and lightning while the human catastrophes include wars, accidents nuclear disasters, murder assault, rape and armed robbery attacks. He added that that when individuals are traumatized of any of the above listed events, stress ensued.

Stressful events, according to him, are relative in nature; age and culture influencing their relativity. For example, to an adult, sexual problems rank lower than to a youth while the African considers the death of a family member more stressful than would the European or the American. In his daily encounters, man is faced with numerous frustrations and let downs like promises that would never come, receiving uncomplimentary statements from other people. etc. This could also make room for stress. Physical environment submerged in filth and its social counterpart which guarantees no security of life and property could result in stress.

Internal causes of stress could be hinged on conflicting choices. When individuals are faced with the need to choose from similar alternatives, stress may ensue. The need to choose from a multiplicity of similar job opportunities, choosing between two evils often result in indecision which often result to stress. Other causes of internal stress are hurrying, uncertainty on what the future holds in stock for one, events, beyond one's control, competition and guilt.

#### 5. NIGERIAN JOURNALISTS AND STRESS

Journalism is about people. It is information disseminated to people. It is communication and also events of the day distilled into a few words, sounds or pictures processed by the mechanics of communication to satisfy human needs. Anaeto (2007) asserted that it is the collection, gathering, organization and presentation of information on events, issues etc to the public; thus keeping the public informed on issues in their environments. On the other hand, a journalist is one whose occupation is journalism. He engages in the collection, writing, editing and publishing of news or news articles, through the print or electronic media.

The importance of journalists in the developing countries cannot be over emphasized. The journalist play a vital role in creating or influencing the people's system of evaluation and behavioural patterns. In the task of nation building, he has contributed immensely. The journalists in the developing countries including Nigeria have contributed in no small way to the propagation of national consciousness, people's co-existence and development cooperation between the heterogeneous communities and sometimes conflicting interest groups. In Nigeria, the journalists have played important role in the process of change while the media remain the only means of obtaining the perspective of the world around and beyond

Perhaps there is nowhere else had stress been so glaring, more diffused and better reinforced than in the media especially newspaper business. This example explains the chaotic situation:

Yinka Adebayo (not real name) is a roving reporter with a daily newspaper in Lagos. Like most of his colleagues on other beats, he works six days in a week and sometimes, no break throughout the week. His daily work schedule demands that he works on general beat, sourcing for news in the morning; retiring to the office in the afternoon. On many occasions, he covers more than one beat in a day and the news stories, he must file in for possible publication. Aside from these daily exercises, he needs to contend with the traffic situation in Lagos because he has no car. He gets to the office amidst various forms of distractions like noise from itinerant sales persons and preachers inside the bus, vehicular fumes etc.

Having reached the newsroom preparatory to writing his stories, the chaotic situation creeps in to reinforce the young man's tension. The television set is blaring the hourly news; so also is the radio set placed few metres from his

desk. He gets home late in the night to find out that the gate had been locked and upon repeated knocks, he entered to face a black-out. Yinka is not only fatigued but also frustrated. This young man is not alone in this predicament. His editor is also stressed. Each day, he examines a pile of manuscripts, edits, proofreads and sometimes re-writes stories to suit the house style of his newspaper. Often, he attends to visitors and the official and personal problems of his subordinates. At home, the wife and children complain of lack of attention due to his non-availability throughout the week and late arrival from work daily.

The stressors in the lives of journalists are legion, emanating from different sources namely: from organization or employer, from jobs, career, relationship with colleagues, family and friends and from an internal negative conceptions of ourselves. From the work place, one of the major stressors one may encounter is the amount of work assigned. It may sound interesting to note that either work overload or job underload will create stress while an overload job mounts unnecessary pressure on the individual thus bringing strains to bear on his or her functional part, an underload job will have similar effect in a different way. Dimkpa (1997) reporting Cranwell-Ward (1987) explains that overload “may result from too much work being allocated to you or attracting too much work to yourself.”

Another major stressor from job-related issue is fear. The editor’s fear of making the wrong decision, which could be costly for the organization may constitute a major stressor so also the inability to take good decisions.

Journalists have been known to work under strict deadlines and this could induce stress. Production of newspaper has deadline guiding its operation; there is time within which news stories must be submitted, so also the printing and the transportation of copies to the markets. If any of these specified times is omitted, it may lead to tension on the part of the operatives.

Stress can be career-induced when our values do not match the demands and circumstances of our progression. Some journalists whose expectations became misplaced in the course of their career may eventually be stressed. The resulting imbalance between their needs or aspirations and that of their career usually leads to stress.

An individual can also develop stressors within himself and by himself. This means all that stress could be self-induced arising from setting unrealistic goals and standards and striving relentlessly to achieve them; when one is unable to manage himself in terms of how he manages his time and design his priorities.

## **6. STRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE**

Stress and job performance are no doubt related. Research by Klev and Kohn (1991) reveals that a prolonged exposure of a worker to stress could create adverse health problems on him thereby lowering his capability to perform his task optimally. A person with tension headache or a stress-related problem is not likely to be at his best in carrying out his or her daily assignment. However, the impact of excessive stress on job performance is felt more in all occupation like publishing which requires creative writing. A journalist’s level of creativity is bound to be negatively affected in a noisy environment or when his mind is bugged by some worrying issues.

## **7. CONTROL OF STRESS**

Control of stress is better accomplished by using diet as a tool. The following diet will help to control stress in stressed persons and go a long way to prevent it in unstressed persons (if such people exist).

- Water is vital in the control of stress. Water intake is important because stress affect the digestive system. i.e the salivary glands and blood hormones secretion is inhibited. Water also help to balance homeostasis and metabolism. Use of water for external body cleansing and cooling is also helpful in stress management.
- As much as possible, avoid the use of drugs, tobacco, stimulants and alcohol.
- Consumption of less fat (less than 30per cent) in your diet is recommended.
- Limit the frequency and quality of food you eat away from home. Here, avoid frequent consumption of fast foods as they only emphasize taste and not health.
- Eating plenty of fruits, vegetables and cereals can also control stress. Intake of vitamins A, B, and C should be increased. These help to assist brain function and indeed the nervous system activities.

## **8. MANAGEMENT OF STRESS**

People who manage stress effectively not only are healthier, they also have more time to enjoy life and accomplish their goals. There are various ways journalists can deal with stress which include shoring up their social support systems, improving on communication skills, developing and maintaining healthy exercise, good eating and sleeping habits, and mastering simple techniques to identify moderate individual stressors. The details are as follows:

a. Social Support: In real life, people need people. Sharing fears, frustrations and joys not only makes life richer but also seems to contribute to the well-being of the body and mind. Meaningful connections with others can play a key role in stress management and overall wellness. A sense of isolation can lead to chronic stress, which in turn can increase one’s susceptibility to temporary illness like colds and to chronic illness like heart disease (Fahel, Insel & Roth, 2003)

- b. Communication: A person who is angry with others often has difficulty forming and maintaining successful social relationships. Better communication skills can help. If someone you are with becomes very angry, respond by reacting not with anger, but with calm. To manage your own anger, try to distract yourself to calm down. Use the old trick of counting to 10 before you respond, or start concentrating on your breathing. At best, you can take a longer cooling off period by leaving the situation until your anger has subsided.
- c. Exercise: Researchers in exercise physiology have found that people who exercise regularly react with milder physical stress responses before, during and after exposure to stressors, and that their overall sense of well-being increases as well. Regular exercise has even more benefits.
- d. Nutrition: A healthy, balanced diet will supply the energy needed to cope with stress. In managing stress, one should as much as possible, limit or void caffeine and do away with the high-potency vitamin compounds and amino acid supplements designated as “stress formulas” (These supplements are worthless for reducing tension or anxiety).
- e. Sleep: Lack of sleep can be both a cause and effect of excess stress. Insufficient sleep makes our mental and physical processes steadily deteriorate. Sleep deprivation and fatigue are major factors in many fatal car crashes whereas adequate rest improves mood, fosters feelings of competence and self-worth, thereby supporting optimal mental and emotional functioning.
- f. Time Management: A successful time management can be crucial to coping with everyday stressors. Overcommitment, procrastination, and even boredom are significant stressors for many journalists. Time management is an important element in a wellness programme and the following strategies will help:-
- \* Set priorities
  - \* Set realistic goals and write them down
  - \* Budget enough time for project
  - \* Break up long-term goals into short-term ones
  - \* Delegate responsibility
  - \* Say no when necessary
  - \* Give yourself a break
  - \* Stop thinking about what you’re going to do; get started.

## 9. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Practitioners of mass media are daily confronted with the pangs of stress in the course of their official assignments. The sources of stress to these class of workers range from having too many decisions to make, job security, excessive travelling, too much work-load to time pressure and deadlines. This paper had presented an overview of the concept of stress, causes, nature and symptoms of stress. It discusses the effects of stress on journalists including effect on job performance. It is important that media practitioners should be adequately prepared to contain the adverse effect of stress by learning the coping strategies. To achieve this, a number of steps were highlighted to control and manage stress in order to have a better healthful living.

These steps include relaxation, being physically fit, exercise and diversion. If one chooses to relax, breathing and muscular relaxation techniques are recommended. Relaxation has been found to relieve tension and stress reaction. It has also been found to reduce blood pressure and other heart disease risk factors. The techniques must be learned and practiced regularly (Igbanugo, 1995).

Some experts, especially psychiatrists have recommended jogging as a way of relieving stress related problems like anxiety, depression and drug addiction. Jogging is a form of exercise which relieves one of the depressed and pessimistic moods usually experienced from time to time. Journalists seldomly create time for exercises and what some of them regard as recreation is frequent visitation to pub houses. It is hereby recommended that they should shun excessive consumption of alcohol and smoking of any kind. To cope with stress, they can embrace fast walking, jogging, cycling, swimming, rope jumping and stair climbing. These are light exercises.

Diversion is another recommended panacea for stress and it is the deliberate getting away from the cause or source of tension, if it possible. In this circumstance, if the source of stress is a wicked boss in the office, one should try to change the job. If that is not possible, one can just make sure he does his job well and learn to relax. It could also be a stressful news beat, a reporter can request for a less stressful beat. If the stress is inevitable, the following sources of diversion are suggested. They are playing games (indoor or outdoor), going on vacation, engaging in recreation and joining a social club that engages in wholesome pursuits.

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