

**Age Differentials in Perception of Family Stress by Women**

**Dimkpa, Daisy I.**

Niger Delta University

**Author Note**

Dimkpa, Daisy I., Department of Educational Foundations, Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. Correspondence concerning this article should be  
addressed to: Dimkpa, Daisy I., Department of Educational Foundations, Niger Delta University  
Wilberforce Island, Bayelsa State, Nigeria. E-mail: [daisdimkpadr@yahoo.com](mailto:daisdimkpadr@yahoo.com).

**Abstract**

This study investigated age differentials in the perception of women towards family stress. The descriptive survey design was used and a total of 200 women were randomly selected from two public and private secondary schools and the Ministry of Education in Port Harcourt Municipal Area in Rivers State of Nigeria. The research instrument used was a researcher- designed 'Family Stress Questionnaire'. Simple percentage and ANOVA inferential statistics were used in data analysis. The study revealed that there was a statistical significant difference among women of various age groups in their perception of family stress ( $F_{\text{cal.}} = 17.03; p < .05$ ). Specifically, Duncan's Multiple Range test showed that the women in the age range of 51-60yrs and 61 years and above were significantly different in their perception of family stress from those in the age range of 25-30years; 31-40 years and 41-50 years. Based on these findings, it was recommended among others that the younger women be counselled on issues relating to family stress before marriage, by employing pre-marital counselling. Using group and individual counselling techniques, counsellors should assist women generally in being assertive and to imbibe right attitudes that will help them cope with stress in the family.

Keywords: Family stress, coping, age differentials, women, survey, counselling

## Age Differentials in Perception of Family Stress by Women

### Introduction

Stress is viewed as the psychological reaction which occurs when people perceive an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon them and their capability to meet those demands ((Kroemer & Grandjean, 2001). Stressors on the other hand are regarded as problems requiring solution or situations to which the family must adapt in order to maintain the functioning of the family system (Green, 1992). Some sources of stress include family relationships, occupation and how we think (Dreyfus, 2009). Other workload which causes women to be affected by family stress even without working outside the home include engaging in household duties, motherhood, etc. In which case, stress could be worse when there are inadequate resources to buffer its effect.

Studies in family stress have identified that stress determines depression for fathers than mothers (Schwartzbeg & ScherDytell, 2008; Kasper, Ensminger, Green, Forthergil, Juon, Robertson and Thorpe, 2008). In Nigeria, the situation is different, whereby women are seen to undergo more stress within the family than the men. In alluding to this assertion, Anderson and Leslie (1991) believe that women report significantly more stressors than men, with employment arrangements having no effect. Similarly, there are high levels of agreement on the characteristics of different cultures as pertaining to males and females, where the most traditional roles are found in Nigeria, Pakistan and India (Wikipedia the free Encyclopedia).

The effects of stress could be devastating for women because it affects women's health not only through direct psycho physiologic processes but also modifies the behavior affecting health namely physical exercise, smoking and life quality (Steptoe, Lipsey & Wardle, 1998). Most people see stress as negative although there might be an individual response to it. For instance, family stress experienced could depend on some associated factors as state of working, family issues or individual role issues (Sanlier & Arpaci, 2007). To this end, Sanlier and Arpaci (2007) are of the view that family stress is more prevalent among working women than non-working women because the working women have high levels of stress than their non-working counterparts. Stress experienced by couples increases the risk of depression, heart disease and other problems, and there is a correlation between

persistent poverty and family stress. For example, Kasper et al. (2008) maintain that persistent poverty was detrimental to funding at older ages as was persistent family stress.

### **Objective of the Study**

The objective of this study was to find out if women differ in their perception of family stress on the basis of age. Therefore, the main hypothesis for the study is as follows:

### **Hypothesis**

1. There is no significant difference among women of various age groups in their perception of family stress.

### **Materials and Method**

The research design was a descriptive survey. The population was made up of all the 9,078 women who were household heads in Port Harcourt municipal area of Rivers State, Nigeria. The sample was made up of 200 women selected through stratified random sampling technique from two public and two private secondary schools and the Ministry of Education, Port Harcourt. Schools and the Ministry of Education were targeted for the study due to their having a large concentration of women in their work force. The age group of the sample includes 25-30years (35), 31-40years (78), 41-50years (50), 51-60years (35) and 61years and above (2) respectively.

The questionnaire used for data collection was a researcher designed 'Family Stress Questionnaire' (FSQ). The items of the questionnaire were derived from literature on causes and effects of family stress. It consists of two sections. Section A elicited personal details of the respondents such as name of school, age, marital status, etc. Section B contains 20 items, which sought their perceptions on causes and effects of family stress. The questionnaire was pretested twice on a sample of 50 women (25 each from private and public secondary schools) who were not part of the final sample for the present study. A cronbach Alpha value of .63 was obtained, confirming that the instrument was reliable. The scoring pattern of the instrument was SA=4, A=3, D=2 and SD=1. Data were analyzed using simple percentage for the demographic data and ANOVA statistics for testing the main hypothesis.

### Results

Table 1 reveals that the calculated F-value of 17.03 is higher than the critical F-value of 3.00 at the 0.05 level of significance. This implies that a significant difference exists among the women on the basis of age. Thus, the null hypothesis was rejected. As a result of the fact that the respondents differed significantly in their perception of family stress on the basis of age, the result was further analyzed using Duncan's multiple range test as seen in Table 2.

The result in Table 2 shows that women aged 61 years and above were significantly different from women of other age groups. Thus, the hypothesis was rejected. This means that there is a significant difference among women of various age groups in their perception of family stress.

### Discussion

The main hypothesis comparing women of various age groups in their perception of family stress revealed a significant difference. Specifically, Duncan's multiple range test indicated similarity in the perception of family stress by women within the age range of 51-60 years and 61 years and above. On the other hand, there were similarities in the perception of family stress by women within the ages of 20-30 years, 31-40 years and 41-50 years respectively. This finding is surprising because one would have expected women in the higher age range of 41-50 years and 51-60 years to be similar, thus implying that the older the women, the higher their perception of family stress. A possible reason could be due to the influence of the African culture in which secrecy is highly maintained especially among women. Hence, it is likely that respondents were not very sincere with their responses for fear of exposure of what is held secret in their homes. This finding is in line with the submission of Sanlier and Arpacı (2007) that individuals may experience family stress in terms of their state of working, family issues or individual role issues.

However, the finding that those women within the age range of 51-60 years and 61 years and above showed similarity could be because they have all experienced stress with their family life cycle, as a result of which they are hardened by the various stressors; determining to make the best of the situation. Finally, women within the ages of 20-30 years and 31-40 years are still in the romantic periods of their marriage while some are yet to experience child birth, motherhood and their attendant problems which could be reasons why their perceptions are different from those of the older women.

### **Counselling Implications**

This study has clearly shown that women were significantly different in their perception of family stress on the basis of age. This means that counsellors should target women for counselling, which is capable of helping the women to cope with stress better using assertive training techniques and helping them to understand the various sources of stress as well as working to prevent or minimize its occurrence. It is particularly important for counsellors who are involved with premarital counselling to give useful information concerning family stress to younger intending couples, which will equip them for the task ahead. This means that counsellors should use group counselling method to inculcate right attitudes in young women and device coping strategies that will help them in advance. Counselling helps in taking care of the underlying problem causing stress, by giving women the opportunity to relax and calm down. More importantly, women should be helped by counsellors to imbibe positive thinking as well as taking away any form of complication while emphasizing more on spirituality and stress relief. In this situation, the women are encouraged to engage in social functions such as picnics and friendships, which relieve tension and frustration.

Finally, there is need for consistent group counselling for women aimed at re-orientating them on the need for close monitoring of their source of worrying and anxiety in order to avoid depressive tendencies, even as literature has shown that stress could lead to depression. In addition, individual counselling should be encouraged by counsellors in which case there is individualized attention for women who might find it difficult to air their views in a group. Moreover, counsellors can engage the women in assertive training techniques which will enable them to believe in their ability to overcome stress in the family.

### **Recommendations and Conclusion**

As a result of the finding that women were significantly different in their perception of family stress by basis of age, the following were recommended:

1. Schools' curriculum at the tertiary level of education should be expanded to include information related to causes and effects of family stress and ways of handling them so as to prepare women in particular on how to cope with the problem in future.

2. Counsellor education programmes should be rich in techniques of handling stress within the family and developing new and existing theories in their practice. For example, some strategies that can be employed

are the Rational Emotive Therapy which seeks to help women become more rational in their thinking and behaviour Modification Therapy, useful for cognitive restructuring to bring about a desired change in behaviour.

3. Enlightenment campaign should be carried out by women organizations in Nigeria such as the National Council of Women Societies (NCWS) which will help in sensitizing women on the need to seek for help through counselling and regular seminars on how to cope with stress.

4. Religious groups should also be challenged to plan programmes that are aimed at helping women with information on stressors and preventive strategies, especially highlighting the spiritual aspect of coping with stress in the family.

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**Tables****Table 1:** ANOVA on Perception of Family Stress on the basis of Age

Sources of Variation	df	ANOVA Sum of Squares	Mean Square	Cal. F-value	Crit. F-value
Age	4	6212.74	15553.19	17.03*	3.00
Error	195	17789.13	91.23		
Corrected Total	199	24001.88			

\*Significant,  $P < 0.05$

**Table 2:** Duncan's Multiple Range Test on Women's Perception of Family Stress by Age

Duncan Group	Mean	Number	Age
A	78.714	7	5*
A	78.033	30	4*
B	68.260	50	3
B	63.795	78	2
B	62.400	35	1

\*Significant,  $P < 0.05$

Age- 1= 20-30yrs; 2= 31-40yrs; 3= 41-50yrs; 3= 41-50yrs; 5- 61yrs and above.