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## An Examination of the Perceived Stress and Coping Strategy for Pastor's Wife in Nigeria

**ABSTRACT:** *The paper examined stress management with special emphasis on Pastor's wife. This work is germane because of the statistical data in the country of Nigeria which revealed the rate at which people are dying as a result of diseases associated with stress. It is believed that stress, if not properly managed, could lead to several ailments, such as high blood pressure, diabetes, chronic headache, insomnia, and the likes. In addition, the study noted that both male and female are affected by stress, but the fact is that women are more likely to experience stress. This is because she plays multiple roles of a home-maker, a mother, a professional, and the added responsibility of bearing children. The paper further highlights some factors that cause stress for Pastor's wife. In order to determine this, focal group discussion was used to obtain information and perceptions that might not have come through questionnaire. The findings revealed that overload of work coupled, with the divided attention of their spouse, are the major cause of stress for Pastor's wife. Also, the empirical data given in the work would serve as convincing grounds for policy makers in both the church and society, at large to work towards educating people to manage their schedule in such a way that it would not take at all on their health. The need for Pastor's wife to set boundaries for themselves, at least for the purpose of their mental, physical, and spiritual well-being was recommended.*

**KEY WORD:** Stress; Pastor's Wife; Coping Strategy; Church and Society; Mental and Physical Health.

**ABSTRAKSI:** "Sebuah Ujian dalam Menerima dan Strategi Mengatasi Stres bagi Istri Pendeta di Nigeria". Makalah ini meneliti manajemen stres dengan penekanan khusus pada istri Pendeta. Karya ini sangat lekat karena data statistik di negara Nigeria ini mengungkapkan tahapan di mana orang-orang sekarat akibat penyakit yang berhubungan dengan stres. Hal ini diyakini bahwa stres, jika tidak dikelola dengan baik, dapat menyebabkan beberapa penyakit, seperti tekanan darah tinggi, diabetes, sakit kepala kronis, insomnia, dan sejenisnya. Selain itu, penelitian ini mencatat bahwa baik laki-laki maupun perempuan dipengaruhi oleh stres, tetapi kenyataannya perempuan lebih mungkin untuk mengalami stres. Hal ini karena ia memainkan peran ganda dari mengurus rumah tangga, menjadi seorang ibu, pekerja terampil, dan tanggung jawab tambahan bagi sandaran anak-anaknya. Makalah ini lebih menyoroti beberapa faktor yang menyebabkan stres bagi istri Pendeta. Untuk menentukan ini, diskusi kelompok terfokus digunakan dalam memperoleh informasi dan persepsi yang mungkin tidak bisa didapatkan melalui kuesioner. Temuan mengungkapkan bahwa kelebihan beban kerja, ditambah dengan perhatian yang terbagi sebagai pasangan suami-isteri, adalah penyebab utama stres bagi istri Pendeta. Juga, data empiris yang diberikan dalam bekerja untuk melayani merupakan alasan meyakinkan bagi para pembuat kebijakan, baik gereja maupun masyarakat, yang pada umumnya bekerja untuk mendidik umat agar mereka mampu mengelola jadwal sedemikian rupa sehingga tidak akan mengurangi sama sekali kesehatan mereka. Kebutuhan istri Pendeta untuk mengatur batas-batas tugas mereka sendiri, setidaknya untuk tujuan kesehatan mental, fisik, dan spiritual adalah direkomendasikan.

**KATA KUNCI:** Stres; Istri Pendeta; Strategi Mengatasi; Gereja dan Masyarakat; Kesehatan Fisik dan Mental.

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## INTRODUCTION

The extent to which religious activities are increasing daily in Nigerian society is not only alarming, but has had negative effects on the well-being of those directly concerned. In Nigeria, stress has become the part and parcel of life (Owolabi *et al.*, 2012; and Etebu, 2016). Again, it is necessary in order to achieve in today's world, but a serious problem arises when stress happens in excess, as it is the leading cause for most killer diseases.

Nigerian women are not left out of this problem of stress, because they play important roles in the life of the church. Women represent the lion's share of Christians and the majority of participant in religious activities. Their participation rated markedly higher than that of men in 12 out of 13 religious activities assessed by the BRG (Barna Research Group), including church attendance, leadership, giving, and evangelism (Butrin, 2016).

Some women expressed a need to work harder and do better to prove themselves worthy to minister in a traditionally male-dominated profession (Wang, 2007; and Butrin, 2016). But this has constituted or lead to feelings of frustration, anger, resentment, depression, anxiety, and ultimately burn out as a result of their intense levels of involvement.

Therefore, stress, being an inevitable part of most peoples' lives, is most likely to have a greater effect on women. This is because women have different emotional disposition and personalities as compared to men (Khuwaja *et al.*, 2002; Wood & Eagly, 2002; and APA, 2012). Although the psychological change that occur during stress may be the same as that of men, but women tend to have different kind of reactions at varying severity levels. Consequently, their coping

mechanisms tend to be different from men.

The article is, therefore, intent on objectively to study and document what constitutes stress for Pastor's wife within the Nigerian society, and to identify existing forms and nature of their stress. However, for the purpose of clarity, the paper is divided into three sections.

The first section broadly focuses on the biblical teachings on the roles of wives and what stress is all about. Section two of the paper will examine some religious activities in the church that may likely constitute stress for Pastor's wife and its consequences. The last section of the paper will offer the coping strategy that could be adopted by Pastor's wife. The paper will be rounded off with some recommendations.

Limitations of research encountered, included the following encumbrances. Non cooperative attitude of some women, language, and translation have to be grappled with because some Pastor's wife are not fluent in English.

***What is Stress All About?*** Stress could be defined as a state manifested by a specific syndrome that consist of all the non-specifically induced changes within a biological system (Selye, 2013). The *Merriam-Webster's Collegiate Dictionary* (1993) defined Stress as "a continuous feelings of worry about your work or personal life that prevent you from relaxing". Stress is also seen as a condition that harms the body or cells or caused the death of a few or many. Stress is said to occur when the body tries to repair the damaged cells, but sometimes the rebuilding of cells is not able to keep coordination with the destination.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup>See, for example, "Home Remedy and Advice for Stress Management". Available online at: <http://www.articlebase.com/wellness> [accessed in Ado, Nigeria: May 20, 2016]; and "Health Herbs and Nutrition". Available online at: <http://www.healthherbsandnutrition.com/remedies> [accessed in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria: May 20, 2016].

Studies have indicated that inadequate sleep is the chief reason for stress-related diseases. If one is short of sleep, one may suffer from sadness, nervousness, delayed reflexes, mental and physical exhaustion, slower metabolism, sluggish recovery from infections and diseases, depressed immune system, decreased attention span, and bad temper. Deficient in sleep takes a toll on brain function. This is because while the working half will work for harder balance (Grinnell, 2014; Mercola, 2014; and Lusambili *et al.*, 2015).

Many diseases that are associated with stress are heart diseases, like diabetes, headache, peptic ulcer, ulcerative colitis, chronic dyspepsia, asthma, and sexual disorders (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979; and Anggarwal *et al.*, 2011). Some factors identified to be responsible for stress are hormonal factors, chronic diseases, overload of work, and feeling of inferiority. Meditation and physical exercises are suggested as an effective stress remedy by experts (Zolli, 2013; and Corliss, 2014). However, the meaning of stress as explained by the *Advanced Learners Dictionary* will be adopted for this article (cited in Lew, 2013).

Having understood what stress is all about, the next sub-heading will be looking at the biblical teachings on the roles of wife. This aspect of the work is very important, because it will give us an insight into what are expected of a Pastor's wife.

## FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

### *The Bible and the Role of the Wife.*

Only a few scripture passages address the role of the wife of overseers (Pastors/ Leaders) and deacons, but the few are powerful. In the first place, *I Timothy* (3) verse 11 says, as follows:

Wives are to be women worthy of respect, not malicious talkers but temperate and trustworthy in everything (cited in Wilson, 2015).

While there is some controversy over interpretation of the original language regarding whether this passage is referring to deaconesses as officers in the church, or the wives of deacons, it appears to be applicable to women who have high visibility and influence in the church (GB, 2012; and Butrin, 2016). This is because of their acts of kindness, help and of charity, which only a woman could properly do for another woman. Frances Nordland (1972) provides a practical solution for what ministers' wives should be like:

We need to recognise that in the early church period, the leaders of the church were men, whom we would now designate as laymen. There was no separation, as now, between clergy and laymen, making a separate class of people in the church known professionally as ministers! So, if you want to learn from the Bible what a minister's wife should be like, you must look for references to wives. You will find no double-standard-one for the Pastor's wife and one for the lay-men's wife (Nordland, 1972:12).

Note that Paul admonishes both overseers and their wives to be "*worthy of respect*" in *I Timothy* (3) verses 2, 8 and 11. Commentaries translate and rephrase the words "*worthy of respect*" (verse 11) as dignified, honourable, holy or stately. It is a positive term that denotes a seriousness of mind and character (Wilson, 2015). According to William Hendriksen (1957) and William Barclay (1975), it does not mean austere or unbending as cited in *Philemon* (4) verse 8 and *Titus* (2) verses 2 and 7 (Hendriksen, 1957:133; and Barclay, 1975:99).

To be temperate means to be marked by moderation, not extreme or excessive. Then, it needs be noted that the position

**Table 1:**  
Weekly Programmes

Day	Times	Activities
Monday	6.00 AM – 7.00 AM	Breakfast with Jesus
Tuesday	5.30 PM – 6.30 PM	Digging Deep
Wednesday	6.15 AM – 7.00 AM	Hour of Mercy
Saturday	4.00 PM – 5.00 PM	Prayer Meeting for Pregnant Women
Sunday	7.45 AM – 9.30 AM 9.30 AM – 10.30 AM 10.30 AM – 12.00 PM	Two services, the morning section is between 7.45 AM – 9.30 AM.

**Table 2:**  
Special Programmes

Day	Times	Activities
3 <sup>rd</sup> Friday of the Month	8.00 PM – 6.00 AM	Parish Night Vigil
4 <sup>th</sup> Friday of the Month	9.00 PM – 5.00 AM	Provincial Night Vigil
1 <sup>st</sup> Friday of Every Month	--	Holy Ghost Service at the Redemption Camp
3 <sup>rd</sup> Wednesday of the Month	6.00 PM – 8.00 PM	Workers Prayer Meeting
3 <sup>rd</sup> Sunday of Every Month	--	Good Women Prayer Meeting. The wife of the Pastor will coordinate the programme.

carries with it the responsibility to manage her family in a way that will cause her to be worthy of respect. Now for the fact that Pastor's wives have to play multiple roles of a homemaker, a mother and a professional, they also have the added responsibility of bearing children (Fussell, 1988; and GB, 2012). Managing these multiple roles together with ministry and a general fixer of all things, make them to be qualified as a star scorer on the life stress scale.

In view of this, it could be rightly said that Pastor's wives have a lot to contend with. Apart from the above, there are some other religious activities and other issues that cause stress for them. These and many others will be discussed below.

***Some Identified Factors Responsible for Pastor's Wife Stress.*** It consisted of three matters: (1) Busy Schedule of Religious Activities; (2) Balancing Schedule; and (3) Loneliness and Divided Attention of Their Spouse. The description is as follows:

***First, Busy Schedule of Religious Activities.*** One of the major issues that is causing stress for Pastor's wife is the busy schedule of religious activities of most churches. In each religious programmes scheduled for every month, Pastor's wives are expected to attend all (Fussell, 1988; GB, 2012; and Butrin, 2016).

More than half of the women I discussed with says, the programmes in most cases take much of their time (interview with Respondent A, 2/3/2016). For example, in the Redeemed Christian Church of God, Life Gate Parish in Ado-Ekiti, Nigeria, the programmes scheduled for each month are hereby given in table 1.

So, as shown in table 1, in between the first and second service, Sunday school will commence by 9.30 AM and end at 10.30 AM (*Ante Meridiem*). The second service will start by 10.30 AM and end by 12.00 PM (*Post Meridiem*). But it needs be noted that in some cases, Pastor usually exceed the allotted time, thereby dragging the

service to 2.00 PM on some occasions.

In fact, I could remember a particular day, when the digging deep on Tuesday ended around 7.20 PM (interview with Respondent B, 2/3/2016). See also table 2.

Apart from the table 2, there are some impromptu meetings the Pastor's wife must attend. At times, they hold the meetings midnight at the Provincial headquarters. Also, attendance at weddings and funerals and women's special programmes are few of those programmes they must attend and fully participate or being given role to play. Minister's wives mentioned on the survey carried out that one of the frustrations of their role was that of having to attend programmes on a regular basis. This is not an easy tradition to change as rightly observed by a Pastor's wife (Butrin, 2016; and interview with Respondent C, 2/3/2016).

Perhaps, a glimpse into the experiences of a few Pastor's wife will be relevant at this point, as follows:

*[...] anytime I take excuses from my husband that I am tired, because of my state of pregnancy and I cannot attend weekly programmes, his usual response has always been, "You are a Pastor's wife and you don't have any excuse to stay at home". But look at me now, after attending the Parish night vigil, I fell into premature labour and has still birth. But before now, I have been warned strictly in the hospital to always rest and not attend vigil because of the high blood pressure I have (interview with Respondent D, 9/3/2016).*

*[...] I tried to turn down some invitations and absent myself from some weekly programmes, because of my busy schedule at office. But it seems not to work out, I was abused that I am too lazy. And all I am trying to do was to be careful as much as possible, because of my state of health and my work (interview with Respondent E, 9/3/2016).*

*[...] I feel that everyone wants a piece of me, or expects me to do more than I can handle (interview with Respondent F, 9/3/2016).*

These experiences may seem fictional, but they are actually not. They are true life experiences of Pastor's wife. The age range of the women, who narrated their experiences above are between 28-42 years old. This shows to a large extent that the young married women are the ones that are most stressed up. Those who have passed child-bearing age and their children are grown up have lesser burden and stress.

**Second, Balancing Schedule.** When Pastor's wives were asked to name the things that cause the most stress in their lives, the most common responses were balancing the demands of the congregation with the responsibilities of raising children, being a supportive wife, keeping an organised household, and feeling guilty for not giving enough time for any of these role (interview with Respondent A, 2/3/2016; interview with Respondent B, 2/3/2016; and interview with Respondent C, 2/3/2016). Coping with the demands of the people, trying to be all things to all people and the demand of domestic roles has been no doubt a problem (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979).

The family suffered a major set-back as a result of this conflict. The children are left to themselves to grow alone, choosing their role models from television and movies. This many explain the reason why most Pastor's children are truants (Adebayo, 2001). There are even some cases where female house help has snatched the husband of her mistress, because she is the one always attending to the man's needs. But when such happens, they always attribute the blame to be the work of the devil (Oderinde, 2002:37).

**Third, Loneliness and Divided Attention of Their Spouse.** Another issue that is of major concern to most Pastor's

wife is the neglect suffered in the hands of their spouses. Some women complained that their husbands give much priority to the ministry than their families (interview with Respondent D, 9/3/2016; interview with Respondent E, 9/3/2016; and interview with Respondent F, 9/3/2016).

To corroborate this assertion, when asked, a clergy of Anglican Communion that question “*between your wife and ministry, what will you choose first?*”. He answered: “*You know the answer, Jesus, the cornerstone of my faith*” (interview with Respondent G, 16/3/2016). This idea of not given their wife attention makes some women to be upset. In this context, Edward B. Bratcher (1984) assesses the situation this way:

Many ministers can be faulted for having the immature belief that if they are doing God’s work, God will take care of their wives and families. There is no biblical evidence to support such a view; however, the feeling that God provides a special protective shield and/or companionship for the minister’s family, while he is away doing “the Lord’s work” is prevalent. Such a view spells neglect (Bratcher, 1984:95).

Also, in order to determine the extent of their level of loneliness and challenges, some Pastor’s wives were asked these questions: (1) Do you attend concerts together?; (2) Do you exercise together?; and (3) If you could say anything to your husband, and if you knew what he would listen with a bent to understand what he hears, what would you like to say to him?

Twenty-two percent of the women indicated that they have a good communication with their husbands, they talk everything through and have developed trust, have worked at the marriage, have become away of each other’s weaknesses, and have become best

friends (interview with Respondent D, 9/3/2016; interview with Respondent E, 9/3/2016; and interview with Respondent F, 9/3/2016). One of them even said, “*he cares, he listens, he responds*” (interview with Respondent F, 9/3/2016).

A few among the other 60 percent provided the following answers, which give us some insight into their challenges:

*You seem to have more time to hear others than I* (interview with Respondent A, 2/3/2016).

*Sometimes I just need your undivided attention or genuine interest* (interview with Respondent B, 2/3/2016).

*You give your best time, listening and caring, to everyone before me* (interview with Respondent C, 2/3/2016).

*We get the anger, no patience, no time when we are away (from home). You don’t want to talk. It is very frustrating. I don’t have anyone. The kids have their own friends to share with. Life has become too serious* (interview with Respondent D, 9/3/2016).

*When I come to you with a problem, I want you to be my husband, not my Pastor. I don’t want a sermon. I’m not one of your counselees. I want sympathy and understanding* (interview with Respondent E, 9/3/2016).

Lastly, other issues that are responsible for most Pastor’s wife stress are: (1) feeling frustrated at being relegated a lesser role, while feeling the same call to ministry as one’s husband; (2) feeling unappreciated in the support role of Pastor’s wife; (3) feeling drained by the constant schedule demands that go with ministry; and (4) feeling isolated and alone due to taboos concern, no friendship in the church (interview with Respondent D, 9/3/2016; interview with Respondent E, 9/3/2016; and interview with Respondent F, 9/3/2016).

Against this background, the next sub-

heading of this paper will be focussing on the consequences of stress in women's life.

**The Consequences of Stress.** The following are the consequences of constant exposure to stressful situations:

Firstly, *Tension Headache*. Women who have been through various stressful events tend to experience tension headache, sometimes daily, if the stress level remains high. In chronic conditions, these headaches refuse to go away despite medications (Dobson, 1995:58).

Secondly, *Insomnia*. A working woman that has two full time jobs – one at a work place, the other as a mother and the other as mother to the congregation. The enormity of the work leads to stress related insomnia, often requiring medication to get the much required rest (Cohen & Lazarus, 1979; and Golub, 2012).

Thirdly, *Female Irritability*. Female irritability is not only a sign of post menstrual syndrome. Irritability can also occur due to the overwhelming amount of tasks that women have to perform. Wondering how everything will get done, women often get stressed out, which leads to irritability. Female irritability often translates into lashing at children, husband, and colleagues (Horner, 2005).

Fourthly, *Memory Lapses*. Often dismissed as insignificant occurrences, but frequent memory lapses are a typical sign of stress (Butrin, 2010). Actually, the mind is so focused concentrated in handling a specific task at hand, but missing out on certain aspects that need to be remembered becomes common. A woman will often forget why she went to the kitchen and will remember only when she is back that it was the pot of yam that she forget to bring home (Mitchell, 2016).

Fifthly, *Increased Vulnerability to Stress*.

Stressed women are more susceptible to developing infections and skin diseases. This is mainly due to the negative effects that constant stress has on the immune system (Segerstrom & Miller, 2006).

The question to be asked here is what, then, are the coping strategies that Pastor's wife need to apply in order to get out of these problem? Though, there are so many things that need to be taken into consideration to solve the problem. But out of many, five coping strategy will be highlighted below.

**Coping Strategies that Could be Adopted.** It consisted of setting of time boundaries, taking a break, and others. Firstly on setting of time boundaries. Most Pastor's wife, start off trying to be all things to all people. Experience usually proves that there are limits to what they can give. One Pastor's wife asked, as follows:

*Is it a good thing to have boundaries, or are they going to be hurtful? (interview with Respondent B, 2/3/2016).*

The dictionary states that a boundary fixes a limit (cited in Dobson, 1995). That is all. Establishing a boundary may hurt a person, but if her feelings are considered it will not harm her (Cloud & Townsend, 1992:149). The person most often hurt in the long run is one who fails to have boundaries.

Secondly on taking a break. Taking a break is a well-proven survival technique, for example, those who pastor small churches seem to especially be in a high-stress category, but both husband and wife must work together for ways to relieve that stress. Pauses from intensive periods of hard work will refresh, reduce over sensitivity, and helps to survive (Flynn, 1992:109).

Thirdly on other activities, especially regular physical exercise. Regular physical exercise also plays an important role against stress. This is because exercise provides relaxation and recreation (Walford, 2006; and Benson *et al.* eds., 2008). This is one of the simplest and effective remedy. One of the suggestions, according to H. Benson *et al.* eds. (2008), pertaining to regular physical exercise is as follows:

- Taking sufficient sleep for 8-10 hours in a day.
- If you feel alone, seek out family members, friends, religious or social services. They can offer support and companionship.
- Make yourself busy.
- Listen to light music. It is also very helpful in stress management (Benson *et al.* eds., 2008).

## CONCLUSION

Women who are Pastor's wife are very important in their husband ministry, because it places them in an enviable position in the society. But the fact is that it demands that they work twice as hard as their male counterparts. Though this demand can be stressful and scaring, women must brace up to face the challenges involved.

However, I urge the Pastor's wife to know their limits and capability, strive to live within them, and take a very good care of themselves. It is when they do this and keep the lines of communication between themselves and their spouses that they will excel in ministry. Then, involving oneself in an activity that will not be appreciated and the end causing additional problems should be stopped.<sup>2</sup>

<sup>2</sup>**Statement:** I wish to declare that the paper is an original article written by me. It is not a product of plagiarism and it has not been submitted and published in any scholarly journals.

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**The Pastor's Wife in Nigeria**

(Source: <https://www.youtube.com>, 15/12/2016)

Nigerian women are not left out of this problem of stress, because they play important roles in the life of the church. Women represent the lion's share of Christians and the majority of participant in religious activities. Their participation rated markedly higher than that of men in 12 out of 13 religious activities assessed by the BRG (Barna Research Group), including church attendance, leadership, giving, and evangelism.