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AVAILABILITY AND UTILIZATION OF SCHOOL COUNSELLORS IN STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG TEACHERS AND STUDENTS IN PUBLIC SECONDARY SCHOOLS IN AWKA EDUCATION ZONE, ANAMBRA STATE: A COMPARATIVE STUDY

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Abstract

This paper reviews existing literature on the availability and utilization of school counsellors for stress management among teachers and students in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone, Anambra State, Nigeria. Drawing on Selye's (1956) general adaptation syndrome and Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping, the paper situates teacher occupational stress and student academic stress within one conceptual frame and examines how far school counsellors are available and actually consulted to manage both. The review shows that stress is well documented among Nigerian secondary school teachers (Akuezuilo &Azuji, 2019; Fadare et al., 2024; Oforjindu, 2011) and students

(Adinde et al., 2026), yet counselling units are frequently under-resourced and inconsistently used by both groups (Dimkpa et al., 2022; Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). The paper proposes a comparative survey design future research could use to measure and contrast teachers' and students' access to, and use of, counselling support for stress, and concludes that strengthening counsellor staffing, visibility, and role clarity is central to improving stress-management outcomes for both groups.

Keywords: School Counsellors, Stress Management, Teachers, Students, Public Secondary Schools, Awka Education Zone.

Introduction

Stress is an inseparable part of the modern school environment, affecting both the students expected to learn within it and the teachers expected to teach within it. The World Health Organization (2026) describes stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation that becomes harmful when demands consistently exceed a person's coping resources — a description that captures the experience of many secondary school teachers and students across Nigeria, where large class sizes, examination pressure, and inadequate infrastructure converge within the same institutions (Akuezuilo &Azuji, 2019; Adinde et al., 2026).

Public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone mirror this national picture: teachers contend with heavy

instructional loads and limited institutional support (Egenti, 2018), while students face examination anxiety layered onto the general pressures of adolescence (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). Both groups occupy the same school community, yet they are rarely studied together, and the professional resource notionally available to both — the school counsellor — is usually examined in relation to only one group at a time. Counsellors are trained to support the wellbeing of an entire school community, not students alone (Aluede & Adubale, 2020), which in principle makes them a shared resource for stress management. In practice, however, a counselling unit's presence on a school's staff list does not guarantee that either group is aware of, has access to, or chooses to use it (Dimkpa et al., 2022). This paper reviews existing literature to examine that gap and compare what is known about teachers' and students' experience of stress and counselling support in Awka Education Zone.

Statement of the Problem

Nigerian studies establish fairly consistently that teachers and students experience considerable school-related stress (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Fadare et al., 2024; Ozoemena et al., 2021; Adinde et al., 2026) and that counsellors are formally mandated to help manage it (Aluede & Adubale, 2020). Far less established is whether counsellors are available in sufficient numbers and whether teachers and students make comparable use of them. Anambra-based studies have examined teachers' perception of counsellors' general task performance (Egenti, 2018) and students' perception of counselling

services broadly (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018), but neither focused specifically on stress management. Elsewhere in Nigeria, counselling units are reported as understaffed and poorly resourced (Dimkpa et al., 2022), raising the possibility that even a nominally present counsellor is not meaningfully reaching either group. No study identified here directly compares teachers' and students' availability of, and utilization of, counsellors for stress management within the same Awka Education Zone schools, leaving administrators without a clear evidence base for allocating counselling resources.

Purpose of the Study

This paper aims to (a) synthesize existing literature on the availability of school counsellors for stress management in public secondary schools, with attention to Awka Education Zone; (b) compare what this literature reveals about teachers' and students' utilization of counselling services for stress; and (c) propose a research design that could empirically test and extend these comparisons. Teachers and students are treated here as two groups sharing one institutional resource, whose comparative experience of it has direct implications for how schools allocate and strengthen counselling support.

Research Questions

This review, and the study it proposes, is guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent are school counsellors available for stress-management services in public secondary schools

in Awka Education Zone?

2. To what extent do teachers utilize school counsellors for stress management?

3. To what extent do students utilize school counsellors for stress management?

4. What differences exist between teachers' and students' utilization of school counsellors for stress management?

5. What factors facilitate or constrain counsellor availability and utilization in Nigerian public secondary schools?

Significance of the Study

This review benefits several groups. For administrators in Awka Education Zone, it offers a literature-based picture of how counselling resources are typically distributed and used, informing decisions on staffing and scheduling. For counsellors, it clarifies the comparative demand of serving both adult staff and adolescent students with different stress profiles and help-seeking behaviours. For policymakers, it highlights structural gaps found across other Nigerian states that likely recur in Awka Education Zone. For researchers, it proposes a concrete comparative survey design in an area where direct teacher–student comparisons remain rare in the Nigerian counselling literature.

Theoretical Framework

Two complementary theories underpin this review.

Selye's (1956) general adaptation syndrome describes stress as a physiological response occurring in three stages — alarm, resistance, and exhaustion — as an organism adapts to a persistent demand; applied here, both teachers under chronic occupational pressure and students under chronic academic pressure will, without adequate coping support, progress toward exhaustion. Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) transactional model of stress and coping is more directly applicable: it frames stress as arising from a transaction in which demands are appraised as exceeding available resources, with external institutional supports — such as a school counsellor — counted among those resources. This positions teachers and students within one explanatory structure despite different demands, since both draw, in principle, on the same coping resource. Where that resource is unavailable or unused, the model predicts a widening gap between demand and coping capacity for both groups. This review is organized around identifying, from existing literature, how wide that gap appears to be for teachers and students in Awka Education Zone.

Review Of Related Literature

Conceptual Review

The Concept of Stress

Stress has been defined as a physiological reaction (Selye, 1956), a psychological transaction (Lazarus &Folkman, 1984), and a state of mental tension arising when a difficult situation exceeds a person's coping resources (World Health Organization, 2026). Across

these definitions, stress originates from a demand, and its consequences depend on the balance between that demand and the resources available to meet it — a balance that is rarely favourable for either teachers or students in systems characterized by high demand and limited institutional support (Ozoemena et al., 2021).

Occupational Stress Among Secondary School Teachers

In a survey of 1,574 secondary school teachers in Anambra State, Akuezuilo and Azuji (2019) found that most experienced school-related stress tied to instructional delivery and the social-support climate of their work to a high extent. Oforjindu (2011) similarly linked unmanaged teacher stress to reduced classroom effectiveness and argued for stronger counselling implications, while Fadare et al. (2024) tied effective stress management directly to teacher productivity in Kwara State. Ozoemena et al. (2021), studying Nigerian teachers more broadly, found notable psychological distress and burnout alongside reliance on individual coping strategies rather than formal institutional support. Together, these studies show teacher stress is well documented, but the specific role of school counsellors in addressing it remains under-examined.

Academic-Related Stress Among Students

Adinde et al. (2026) found that Nigerian secondary school students draw substantially on peer and family counselling to manage academic pressures, implying that formal school-based counselling is not their primary

source of stress-related support. In Awka metropolis, Ezeanyagu and Alike (2018) surveyed 180 senior secondary students and found mixed levels of awareness of, and confidence in, available counselling services. Together, these findings suggest students in and around Awka Education Zone experience real academic-related stress but may turn to informal support at least as often as to their school counsellor.

The Counsellor's Role, Availability, and Utilization

Aluede and Adubale (2020), comparing Nigerian counsellors internationally, found they rank educational and career planning highest among their functions and lean more toward administrative duties than counsellors elsewhere, while assigning low priority to advocacy — a pattern suggesting Nigerian counsellors' time may be pulled away from direct stress-management work with either teachers or students. Egenti (2018) found Anambra teachers' perception of counsellors' task performance to be mixed, and Ogbonna and Aluede(2025) show counsellors are expected to hold a broad skill set extending well beyond academic guidance, which may dilute the attention any single concern such as stress receives. Structurally, Dimkpa et al. (2022) documented inadequate personnel, office space, and funding for counselling units in Rivers State — constraints likely shared in Anambra given the common national policy environment. Utilization appears to hinge on different barriers for each group: professional hierarchy and reluctance to disclose strain to a colleague-level counsellor plausibly limit teacher uptake, while variable awareness and confidence

(Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018) and a pull toward informal support (Adinde et al., 2026) limit student uptake. No reviewed study measured both groups side by side in the same schools — the gap this paper's proposed methodology addresses.

Methodology

This paper is a literature-based review; the following design is proposed to translate its comparative questions into empirical evidence specific to Awka Education Zone. A descriptive survey design, comparative in nature, is recommended, since the study would describe existing conditions and compare two subgroups — teachers and students — as they naturally exist. The population would comprise all teachers and senior secondary students in public secondary schools administratively grouped under Awka Education Zone, with a sample drawn through simple random sampling of schools followed by stratified random sampling of respondents within each, to ensure adequate representation of both groups.

Data would be collected using a researcher-developed Availability and Utilization of Counsellors for Stress Management Questionnaire (AUCSMQ), issued in parallel teacher and student versions built on the same items to permit direct comparison, rated on a four-point scale covering availability, frequency of consultation, perceived effectiveness, and barriers to use. Face and content validity would be established by specialists in guidance and counselling, and reliability estimated through a pilot test using Cronbach's alpha. Data would

be analyzed using mean and standard deviation for the descriptive research questions, and an independent-samples t-test to determine whether teacher–student differences in utilization are statistically significant.

Discussion

The literature reviewed converges on two conclusions. First, stress is well established in both teaching and studying in Nigerian public secondary schools, including in Anambra State (Akuezuilo & Azuji, 2019; Adinde et al., 2026; Ozoemena et al., 2021). Second, the counselling infrastructure meant to help manage it is unevenly available and unevenly used, with underuse traceable to different causes for each group. Viewed through Lazarus and Folkman's (1984) model, both groups face a widening gap between demand and coping resources, since the counsellor common to both is constrained by staffing shortages (Dimkpa et al., 2022), an administratively pulled role (Aluede & Adubale, 2020), and uneven trust or awareness among those it serves (Egenti, 2018; Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018). For Awka Education Zone specifically, the absence of a direct teacher–student comparison is a notable gap: because underuse appears to stem from different mechanisms — plausibly stigma and role ambiguity for teachers, awareness and confidentiality concerns for students — a school that increases counsellor staffing without addressing either mechanism may see availability improve on paper without a corresponding rise in actual use by either group.

Recommendations

Based on the literature reviewed, the following are recommended:

1. The Anambra State Post Primary Schools Service Commission should assess and, where necessary, increase counsellor staffing in Awka Education Zone, given shortages documented in comparable states (Dimkpa et al., 2022).

2. Administrators should schedule and publicize stress-management sessions with counsellors for teachers separately from student-facing sessions, to ease the professional hesitance implied by mixed teacher perceptions of counsellors (Egenti, 2018).

3. Counsellors should communicate confidentiality protections clearly to students, given variable student confidence in counselling services (Ezeanyagu & Alike, 2018).

4. Researchers in the zone should carry out the comparative survey proposed here to establish, with primary data, the actual extent of counsellor availability and utilization among teachers and students.

Conclusion

Teachers and students in public secondary schools in Awka Education Zone face well-documented, if differently sourced, stress, and both share one institutional resource meant to help manage it: the school counsellor. This resource appears inconsistently

available and inconsistently used, with each group facing distinct barriers to seeking support. Addressing this requires attention not only to counsellor numbers but to how their time is allocated, how their services are communicated, and how comfortable each group feels using them. The comparative empirical study proposed here would give administrators and policymakers the evidence base currently missing from the literature, helping ensure counselling support for stress reaches both the adults and the young people within the same school walls.

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