Sales Job Employees’ Personal Characteristics and Choice of Coping Styles

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Purpose: The study assessed choice of coping styles among employees in sales job by considering the role of their personal characteristics.

Design/methodology/approach: It was designed as a survey involving a sample size of 324. It comprised of 228 (69.1%) males and 96 (30.9%) females. Participants were purposively sampled.

Findings: Four coping strategies emerged from data analysis: Tension reduction, Seeking professional support, Focusing on the positive, and Divert thinking. Assessment of participants’ propensity to choose each of these coping styles to ameliorate the effects of stress differed across gender, marital status, age and work experience. Females more than males chose each of the four strategies except focusing on the positive which showed no gender difference. On marital status, single employees preferred ‘Focusing on the positive’ while married workers used more of ‘Divert thinking’. ‘Seeking professional support’ was adopted more by experienced workers while new employees preferred ‘Focusing on the positive’. Older employees also preferred ‘Seeking professional support’ to ‘Focusing on the positive’ which was generally preferred by younger and single employees. It was concluded that choice of coping styles are largely based on employees’ personal characteristics.

Originality/value: This paper has added African perspective to the global literature on coping styles from sales job-related stress which has not been largely documented. Additionally, the outcomes has brought to the fore the need for policy action to address work-related stress for in sales job with due consideration of different characteristics of the workgroups.

Keywords: Assessment, Sales job employees, Coping styles.

Introduction
Effective employees are known to be those who are able to handle the demands of their jobs. Among several work roles, sales jobs constitute one of the most stress-ridden occupations in the field of enterprise (Rivera, 2013). Job stress originate from many sources ranging from role stress, which stems from role conflict and role ambiguity (Netemeyer, Brashear-Alejandro & Boles, 2004) as well as multiple expectations from customers and management (Johnston & Marshall, 2005; Jaramillo, Mulki & Solomon, 2006). While the organization expect high commitment and outstanding sales performance from the salesperson, customers as dealers/retailers/ and consumers require the sales person to be around in time to ensure efficient and effective product delivery.

In the food and beverage industry where the present study set to cover, salespersons are assigned multiple job roles. The salesperson doubles as driver
and product seller who is expected to convert the products to cash for the organization. This shows that both the organization and customers make demands on the salesperson. The job requires the employee to engage in frequent trips that involve days away from home. He/she is made to cover several communities that are far from each other as much as hundreds of miles away. E-commerce is at the lowest level of utilization unlike in developed societies where orders for products are placed online. On the other hand, online sales enjoy high usage in developed and emerging economies. It is typical for employees in sales job in an African country to be assigned sales targets that they do not have input in setting. Often times, the salesperson is expected to engage in face-to-face contact with dealers and retailers of the product(s) several times in a month. The volume of sales largely depends on the salesperson’s ability to build effective interpersonal relationship and make frequent visits to the dealers and retailers in his/her areas of coverage. Frequent travels do take the salesperson significantly limit the time spent at home with family members. This is a common factor in work-family conflict. Apart from the pressure to meet target in order to remain a high performer, the salesperson is saddled with the dual responsibility of generating field information that involve competitors activities, customer satisfaction with product quality, pricing, and other features that define the product in the market. In developed societies, some of these activities are handled by specific units in the Marketing / Research departments.

The resulting inner conflict faced by the salesperson is likely to result in emotional distress which can affect performance and lead to higher turnover intention (McFarland, 2003; Schwepker, 2003). The situation becomes more tasking considering individual differences in social relations. It is a known fact that when stress gets hold of us, all the sales knowledge we have gleaned through training fly out of the window and we return to our accustomed mechanical responses (Rivera, 2013).

Sales jobs are basically stressful because such employment relies on employees’ ability to produce sales to meet expected targets. The job of a salesperson characteristically requires people to meet high levels of standards and often subsume careful dealings with the public and their demands. Since most of the stress involved in sales job is associated with results, it is important to learn to focus less on results while trying to get favourable outcome. While this may serve as a simple strategy to cope with work stress, there are numerous research-based strategies to manage stress.

Lazarus (1991) sees coping as referring to what a person thinks or does in order to manage an emotional encounter. Coping strategies play critical role in an individual’s physical and psychological well-being when faced with challenges or negative events and stress. Coping strategies represent the efforts, both behavioural and cognitive, that people invest in order to deal with stressful encounters (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Over time, extensive research on coping strategies available to individuals when exposed to work-related stress have been done.

Studies on coping with stress have identified several strategies in the literature. Lazarus & Folkman (1984, 1986) developed a transactional model of stress, which highlights the role of appraisals and coping in the experience of stress. Folkman, Lazarus, Dunkel-Schetter, Delongis & Gruen (1986) identified eight different types of coping strategies used by individuals when exposed to perceived stressors. They include confrontational coping, distancing, self-controlling, seeking social support, accepting responsibility, escape-avoidance, planned problem solving and positive reappraisal. The authors identified each of the strategies to serve a relevant purpose in reducing stress.

Assessment of coping can be viewed as a description of the cognitions and behaviours of a person dealing with a stressful encounter (Scharzer & Scharzer, 1996). In making a distinction, Scharzer & Scharzer view coping mechanisms or resources to include hardiness, dispositional optimism, self-efficacy,
sense of coherence and social support. Lazarus & Folkman (1984) define coping as the process of managing internal or external demands that are perceived as taxing or exceeding a person’s resources.

The DSM-IV Adaptive functioning scale (APA, 1994) highlighted coping strategies to include the following: Highly adaptive/active/problem-focused mechanisms which include skills such as affiliation, humour, sublimation (self-presentation) or positive reappraisal of events; Mental inhibition/disavowal mechanisms such as essential defense mechanisms as reaction formation, repression or displacement; Active mechanisms refer to methods which deal with stress by directly taking action. These may include passive aggression or acting out.

It is common knowledge that when people feel overwhelmed at work, they lose confidence and despair and this leads to psychological distress. According to Miller (1987) coping involves individual differences such as monitoring (vigilant attentional style) or blunting (avoiding attentional style) – opposite attentional styles people adopt to combat stress. These are based on the question whether individuals under stress tend to tune into the threat, search for information, and visualize scenarios to control the situation or whether they tune out from the threat, distract themselves, and avoid further information and postpone instrumental action (Schwarzer & Schwarzer, 1996).

Other perspectives in coping have advocated the use of relationship maintenance strategies such as the establishment of communication with co-workers, one’s boss and anyone that may directly affect one’s work atmosphere (Davis, 2011). In addition, Davis suggested the establishment of rules of engagement to reduce work-related stress with the integration of respect and consideration as components of first order and professional business relationships.

The coping and stress profile (center for internal change) reports that there are four generic coping resources assessed at all four areas of life; individual, work, couple and family. These are problem solving, communication, closeness or cohesion and flexibility. Developed from the integrated Multi-system Assessment of Stress and Health Model, which builds on a biopsychosocial model that is multidimensional and is designed to bridge research, theory and practice (Oslon, 1997), the coping and stress profile assesses stress coping resources (cohesion, flexibility, communication and problem solving) and satisfaction for all four areas of life. Two of the coping resources are the skill dimensions of problem solving and communication. The other two coping resources are the relationship dimensions of closeness and flexibility. However, the four are more or less concerned with relationship building as a coping strategy. Moreover, the profile also outlines employee work expectations that impact employment relationship including recognition, autonomy, expression, career growth, diversity, teamwork, structure, comfort, balance and stability. Each of these serves as a buffer against stress.

A number of studies have isolated coping techniques in high stress occupations. Results showed diverse strategies based on the personality components of respondents in a particular study sample. For example, Klauer and Filipp (1993) identified five coping strategies that turned up as dimensions in a factor analysis including: (a) seeking social integration, (b) rumination, (c) threat minimization, (d) turning to religion, and (e) seeking information. In a continued search for empirical knowledge on coping mechanisms, Tsai (2003) assessed coping among nursing students during their paediatric clinical experiences. In the study, “positive reappraisal” was found to be the predominant among the strategies. The second most used way of coping was “self-controlling”. This finding was similar to research outcomes from Mahat (1996), which showed that most students used “self-control” to cope with stress. The next most frequently used coping strategy reported in the study was “seeking social support”. Other researchers also identified seeking social support as the predominant way of coping for

Previous studies indicated that age is a reactivity factor in stress management (Mroczek & Meichenbaum et al, 1975) especially in the distinction between the young and old in intra-individual variability in negative effect of stress (Diehl & Hay, 2010). They conceptualized age as resilience rather than a risk factor in stress management. Age was implicated in choosing strategy by Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley and Novacek (1987) with younger participants being more problem-focused than older participants who were emotion-focused. McCrae (1989) found age to have little overall influence on the coping methods used by men and women. Psychologists have repeatedly identified differences in the way men and women respond to stress. Shelley Taylor and colleagues proposed that when it comes to stress, women are different from men because they readily express affiliative social behaviour or seek social support from friends and family members (Taylor, 2002; Taylor, Klein, Lewis, Gruenewald, Gurung & Updegraff, 2000). Similarly, studies have shown that being married or single portends different things to men and women when faced with stress. According to Zhao, He, Lovrich and Cancino (2000): married police officers experience stressful work-family balance and destructive coping than unmarried officers. Other studies (Wayment & Peplau, 1995; Ptacek, Smith & Dodge, 1994) indicate that married women were more inclined to strategic coping than unmarried women. In terms of job duration; French, Caplan and Harrison concluded that it is the characteristics of the individual in conjunction with the characteristics of the environment that determines an employee’s stress coping mechanisms. However, Balakrishnamurthy and Shankah (2009) found a relationship with experience, age and work stress among police personnel.

As shown in the literature reviewed above, it is obvious that most of the studies presented coping strategies as global. Specifically, they rarely differentiate occupations and societies. Literature is replete with empirical investigations from the west and emerging economies. In those societies, marketing systems are highly developed and organized. In Nigeria particularly, the job of salespeople is coloured with activities that are stress generating. Therefore, attempting to assess the coping strategies in use by salespersons in Nigeria would require the identification of those they consider to be result-oriented. Using global strategies may not provide satisfactory assessment of coping mechanisms for sales personnel. Moreover, most of the studies reported in the literature were done in different cultures and may have some cultural discrepancies when applied in the Nigerian environment.

The paucity of studies that documented coping strategies of salespersons in Africa justifies the need to assess coping strategies among salespersons in the food and beverage industry in Nigeria. Moreover, it is important to assess how these strategies may be adopted by different work groups. In that respect, the present study set to address a major research question:

Will salespersons differ on the basis of gender, marital status, job duration, and age in their choice of coping strategies?

Hypotheses

a. Males will differ significantly from the females in choice of coping strategies

b. Married employees will differ significantly from those who are single in their choice of coping strategies

c. Employees who have stayed longer in sales job will differ significantly from the newer employees in their choice of coping strategies

d. Younger employees in sales would differ significantly from the older employees in choice of coping strategies
Method
Design: This study adopted a survey research design. The dispositional factors of gender, marital status, work experience and age constituted the independent variables while the four extracted factors of tension reduction, seeking professional support, focusing on the positive and divert thinking are the dependent variables.

Participants: Participants were employees from 4 companies who are specifically in sales job-related activities. The companies are: FAN Milk Plc., PZ Cussons Nigeria Plc., Procter & Gamble Nigeria Limited, and Nestle Nigeria Plc. The study involved a sample size of 324. The males were 228 (69.1%), while females were 96 (30.9%). Also, 163 (50.3%) were married while 161 (49.7%) were single. Respondents age range between 18 and 51 with a mean of 32.3 (SD=8.31). Years of job experience ranged from 1 to 16 years (mean of 5.6 and SD 4.22).

Instrument: Questionnaires that contained the Coping style scale was used for data collection. The scale was developed in the study. It involved collecting qualitative data from employees engaged in sales job. They were asked to list all the various ways they cope when they experience work-related stress from their job as salespersons. Frequency distribution was done and a total of 292 items were recorded. They were further reduced to 72 when tally was done to avoid repetition of items. The 72 items which constituted the index was administered and factor analysed. In all, 39 items loaded significantly under 4 factors. Each of the factors was labeled accordingly. The scale items had a 5-point Likert response format.

Sampling Technique: The purposive sampling method was used to select the sample from the population of the study. Simple random sampling technique was used in selecting 1 out of the 4 largest FMCG companies using the balloting technique. Snowball technique was employed in selecting the sample for this study. Sales managers were contacted in order to get link on how to get other sales people that share job characteristics.

Procedure: The stress coping strategy scale was administered to 420 sales officers in 4 fast moving consumer goods (FMCG) companies in Lagos and Ibadan, Nigeria. These were: FAN Milk Plc., PZ Cussons Nigeria Plc., Procter & Gamble Nigeria Ltd, and Nestle Nigerian Plc. A total of 354 questionnaire forms were completed and returned. In all, 30 questionnaires were removed due to completion errors. A total of 324 questionnaires were finally used for analysis.

Results
The first hypothesis which predicted significant differences between male and females in choice of coping strategies was tested and result is presented below:

Table 1. A summary table of t-test results comparing male and females on the choice of four coping strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Coping str.</th>
<th>Sex</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>Sd</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>p</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1Tension reduction strategy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>45.59</td>
<td>8.69</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>-2.94</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>49.08</td>
<td>11.99</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2Seeking professional support strategy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>28.15</td>
<td>6.44</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>-6.21</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>32.75</td>
<td>5.11</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4Divert thinking strategy</td>
<td>Male</td>
<td>228</td>
<td>20.17</td>
<td>5.17</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>-2.16</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Female</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>22.08</td>
<td>5.34</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Results above showed male and females differ significantly on choice of coping strategy when faced with stress on the job. Significant differences were recorded for Tension reduction, factor 1 \( (t= -2.94, \text{df}(322) \ p<.05) \), Seeking professional support, factor 2 \( (t=6.21, \text{df}(322)\ p<.05) \), and Divert thinking, factor 4 \( (t= -2.16, \text{df}(322)\ p<.05) \). Males scored lower in all situations. Therefore, both male and female differ on the choice of Seeking Professional Support, tension reduction and divert thinking as their coping strategy. The result confirmed the hypothesis as proposed.

The second hypothesis proposed that employees who are single will significantly differ in choice of coping strategies from their married counterparts. It was tested and the results are shown below:

Table 2: A summary table of t-test result comparing single and married employees on the choice of coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Marital Status</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>3 Focusing on the positive strategy</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>38.63</td>
<td>9.07</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>3.67</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>35.45</td>
<td>6.36</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4 Divert thinking strategy</td>
<td>Single</td>
<td>161</td>
<td>19.23</td>
<td>4.53</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>-6.88</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Married</td>
<td>163</td>
<td>22.98</td>
<td>5.25</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Single and married employees differ significantly on the choice of coping strategy. Employees who are single scored higher than those who are married on the choice of adopting factor 3, ‘Focusing on the positive’ as their coping strategy \( t=3.67, \text{df}(322)\ p<.05 \). But the married employees scored significantly higher than their unmarried counterpart on adoption of factor 4, ‘Divert thinking’ as their coping strategy \( t=-6.88, \text{df}(322)\ p<.05 \). However, single and married sales officers did not differ significantly on both ‘Tension reduction’ and ‘Seeking professional support’ when faced with stress on their job. This shows that there was no significant difference between single and married persons on their choice of selecting factors 1 and 2. Nevertheless, the hypothesis was retained in the direction proposed.

The third hypothesis predicted that employees who have stayed longer in sales job will differ significantly from the newer employees in their choice of coping styles. It was tested and the results are presented below:

Table 3. A summary of t-test results comparing newly employed with experienced sales officers on the choice of coping strategy

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Years Exper.</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2 Seeking professional support strategy</td>
<td>Newly employed</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>27.65</td>
<td>5.69</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>-5.38</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>longer employed</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>31.34</td>
<td>6.60</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3 Focusing on the positive strategy</td>
<td>Newly employed</td>
<td>160</td>
<td>38.75</td>
<td>7.21</td>
<td>322</td>
<td>3.92</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>longer employed</td>
<td>164</td>
<td>35.35</td>
<td>8.34</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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As proposed by the third hypothesis, results from Table 3 show that there is significant difference between new and experienced employees on the choice of coping styles. Experience sales officers reported significantly higher scores on the choice of 'Seeking professional support' (factor 2) as their coping style than newly employed persons ($t=-5.38$, df (322)$p<.05$). Also, result of the t-test comparison indicates that newly employed sales officers scored significantly higher on 'Focusing on the positive' than experienced employees ($t=3.92$, df (322)$p<.05$). However, results showed no significant difference between newly employed and experienced sales officers on the choice of factor 1 ('Tension reduction') as a coping strategy when faced with stress on their job. Similarly, there was no significant difference between newly employed and experienced sales officers on the choice of adopting factor 4 ('Divert thinking') as a coping strategy. In summary, newly employed and experienced sales officers do not differ on the choice of factors 1 and 4, while there was significant difference between them on the choice of factors 2 and 3 as their coping strategy. The hypothesis was retained as predicted.

Finally, it was hypothesized that younger employees in sales would differ significantly from the older employees in choice of coping styles. This was tested and the result is presented below:

Table 4. Summary of t-test results comparing young and old employees on choice of coping strategies

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Factor</th>
<th>Age</th>
<th>N</th>
<th>X</th>
<th>SD</th>
<th>Df</th>
<th>t</th>
<th>P</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>2. Seeking professional support strategy</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>27.08</td>
<td>6.77</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>-1.15</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>30.51</td>
<td>6.02</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Focusing on the positive</td>
<td>Young</td>
<td>96</td>
<td>40.92</td>
<td>6.64</td>
<td>320</td>
<td>1.43</td>
<td>&lt;0.05</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Old</td>
<td>226</td>
<td>35.49</td>
<td>7.91</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Results above revealed a significant difference between young and old employees in sales on their choice of coping styles when faced with stress on the job. While seeking 'Professional support' is readily a choice for older employees, 'Focusing on the positive' is a style of choice for the young employees ($[t=-1.15$, df (322)$p<.05$] and $[t=1.43$, df = 322, $p<.05$]) respectively. There was significant age difference in adopting this factor (focusing on the positive). More young employees choose this factor in comparison with old employees ($[t=1.43$, df (322)$p<.05$]. The result however shows that there was no significant difference between the young and the old sales officers on their choice of selecting 'Tension Reduction' and 'Divert Thinking' strategy.

Therefore, both old and young differ on the choice of 'Seeking Professional Support' and 'Focusing on the Positive' as their coping strategy. There was however no significant difference between them on the choice of the other two coping strategies.

**Discussion**

Findings revealed significant differences in choice of coping styles based on age, marital status, gender and years of experience of sales officers. All the hypotheses confirmed as proposed.

As previously reported by Meichenbaum, Turk and Burstein (1975) that effective coping might be based on the maturity of the individual person, age was found to influence the choice of coping styles in the present study. It showed that the older employees reported adopting more of 'Seeking professional support' strategy than their younger counterparts who reported the adoption of 'Focusing on the positive' strategy. Another study by Folkman, Lazarus, Pimley, and Novacek (1987) also found differences in choice...
of problem-focused coping and emotion-focused coping by younger and older participants respectively. The old and young sales officers also do not differ in their choice of adopting tension reduction and divert thinking as a coping strategy. The findings of this present study contradict the finding by McCrae (1989) which showed that age had little overall influence on the coping methods used by men and women.

Furthermore, significant difference among males and females were also confirmed in this study and this is in line with the findings of Taylor, (2002) and Taylor et al (2000). Another study by Matheny, Ashby & Cupp (2005) indicated that significant gender differences have been found for stress coping strategies. Day & Livingstone (2003) and Mutud (2004) have found proof that men and women differ on the choice of coping strategy adopted. Females adopt more of tension reduction, seeking professional support and divert thinking their male counterparts. The reason for this result could be because of their perception of work and experience. The findings on adopting seeking professional support of this present study was consistent with the result of seeking instrumental/emotional support by Tamres, Janicki, and Helgeson (2002); Grenglass (2002) and Gary (1998) that women tend to use social support and help-seeking behaviours to cope with stress. Gentry, Chung, Aung, Keller, Heinrich & Maddock (2007) also found that women reported using adaptive coping (problem-focused) strategies such as talking with friends and family, exercising, praying, or actively addressing the causes of stress while men were more likely to use maladaptive and avoidance strategies like drinking alcohol, smoking, taking drugs, following unhealthy eating patterns and ignoring the problem when faced with stress than women (Lindquist, Beilin, and Knuiman, 1997; Gentry et al, 2007). The findings were consistent with the findings of the present study, as females used more adaptive coping strategies than their male counterparts. Also the findings of the present study on ‘Tension reduction’ and ‘Divert thinking’ contradicts the result of Gary (1998) that men and women did not differ in the use of problem-solving or avoidance, just as males and females do not differ in adopting “focusing on the positive” as coping strategy. The present study did not also support Hamilton & Fagot (1998), who found out that there are no differences between the sexes on how they cope with stress. It had previously been reported that men and women are socialized to cope with stress in different ways (Ptacek, Smith, & Dodge, 1994). The present findings corroborate this position as well.

Despite the differences in the coping strategies involved in some previous studies, the differences also reported in the styles developed in the present studies confirmed gender as an important factor that influence the choice of coping strategies even in Nigeria. Age seems to be a factor across cultures.

Marital status was a factor that was found to influence choice of coping styles by employees in sales jobs. While the sales officers who are single reported the adoption of ‘Focusing on the positive’ strategy, their married counterparts reported adopting more of ‘Divert thinking’ as a coping strategy. The findings supported earlier reports by Zhao, He, Lovrich and Cancino (2003). They found differences in choice coping by married police officers who also experience high level of work-family conflict. In a more specific report, Wayment and Peplau (1995) found that women who are married had better psychological well-being than women who are single. This suggests the choice of coping differ for the two categories of sales officers. It may be the case because those who are married tend to look for ways to divert their attention to other family responsibilities when faced with stress.

Regarding, significant difference among the newly employed and longer employed sales officers, it was reported that experienced sales officers adopt more of ‘Seeking professional support’ than the newly employed sales officers. This could be as a result of their understanding of the job and skills/experience. Alternatively, the newly employed sales officers employ
more of ‘Focusing on the positive’ than their longer employed counterparts and this also could be as a result of being new on the job and they tend to view stress faced on the job as a way to learn more about the job. In addition to the above findings, newly employed sales officers and longer employed sales officers do not differ on their choice of adopting tension reduction and divert thinking as a coping strategy. The result is in line with the findings of French, Caplan, & Harrison (1982). They emphasised the characteristics of the individual and the environment as determinant of how a person cope with stress. More concretely, the present findings support the outcomes of earlier study which established a strong relationship between age and level of experience (Balakrishnamurthy & Shankar, 2009).

It can be concluded in this study that dispositional factors of age, gender, marital status and job experience are important issues that influence employees’ choice of coping styles in sales job. This implies that stress management programme designed for sales personnel need to consider the characteristics differences because they have been found to play key roles in adoption of strategies.

The outcome of this study reflects the dynamics in coping styles. It identified coping styles that were hitherto unpopular in the literature, especially among sales personnel. The study has offered a perspective to the body of literature on employees’ coping styles. However, the outcome would have enjoyed broader generalization if more variables were included to examining coping strategies. The dispositional factors may have offer different levels of influence on choice of coping styles if other situational or psychological variables were included.

Therefore, it is suggested that future researchers may include personality and other organizational variables to investigate choice of coping. A major recommendation is that organizations, especially those in the food and beverage industry need to consider the importance of stress management policy to assist employees in sales job. Such a policy need to ensure that characteristic differences are incorporated due to their roles in choice of coping.

References


**Biographical Note**

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