



# Assessment of Dimensions of Stress among Some Categories of Nigerian Army Personnel

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**ABSTRACT:** Stress has for a long time been implicated in Military combat engagements throughout the world. It has been responsible for many psychological illnesses of which PTSD is most noticeable. Using Symptom Distress Checklist (SCL – 90), on 150 Army Personnel comprising of 50 serving combat personnel (SCP), 50 Serving Artisan Personnel (SAP) and 50 retired Mixed Personnel (RMP), the study assesses stress among these three categories of the Nigeria Army Personnel. Employing ANOVA for data analysis, findings revealed that Retired Mixed Personnel (RMP) manifested the highest level of stress than the Serving Combat Personnel (SCP) and the Serving Artisan Personnel (SAP). The result was discussed in terms of the differences in the categories in the study.

**Keywords:** Stress, Nigerian Army, Serving Combat Personnel (SCP), Serving Artisan Personnel (SAP), Retired Mixed Personnel (RMP).

## I. INTRODUCTION

The Nigeria Army has been involved in many combat and military operations both home and abroad. These operations are challenging and demanding in terms of its effects on the soldiers. In addition to combat operations, the Nigerian Army is often called from time to time to maintain peace and order in certain civil disturbances in Nigeria. The Boko Haram insurgency has added yet another of these operations and has seriously tasked the Nigerian Army. No matter how small or large the scope of the operations are, the effect on soldiers is no less consequential as well as the psychological impact associated with them.

Data collected in a nationwide study of Vietnam veterans revealed that a significant proportion of soldiers who were engaged in combat fail to recover from pre – stress levels of functioning and exhibited psychological distress involving cognitive, affective and physiological disturbances within two decades, following combat participation (Kulka, Schlenger, Fairbank, Hough, Jordan, Marmar & Weiss 1990; Snow, Stallman, Stellaman, & Sommer, 1988) Chronic Symptoms of psychological discomfort have been reported in World War II (WWII) combat veterans, (Elder & Clipp, 1989; Grinker & Spiegel, 1945) and Korean conflict (Sulker, Winstead, Galina and Allain, 1991). Furthermore, research has documented anxiety, depression and posttraumatic stress disorder (PTSD) in 16% - 19% of Persian Gulf War troops within the first year of return from war zone duty (Sulker, Udo, Bailey & Allain, 1993).

In combat situations, with continued threat of injury or death and repeated narrow escapes, soldiers ordinary coping methods are relatively useless. The longer a soldier is deployed in combat, the more vulnerable and anxious he/she is likely to feel. That this prolonged effect in combat lowers stress tolerance was exemplified in World War II by “the old sergeant syndrome” in which men of established bravery exhibited anxiety, depression, tremulousness, and impairment of self-confidence and judgment after prolonged experience in combat (Wisdom, 1989; Laoye, 1996)

The effect of stress in the performance and wellbeing of army personnel is incontestable, and further discourse on stress pertaining to army personnel immensely helps in diagnosis, treatment, and prevention of stress disorders in the military (Bartone & Bowles, 2020; Kok, Wilk, Wickham, Bongar, Riviere & Brown, 2020).

Harms, Krasikova, Vanhove, Herian & Lester (2013) studied the role of stress in the army and other military unit with emphasis on why the military job was considered the most stressful job in United States of America (USA), their findings revealed a variety of antecedent factors such as physical danger, public scrutiny, responsibility for one's life that of the others to be the core reasons to why stress levels of military personnel was generally higher in comparison to any other profession. Alternatively, the study concluded that stress resistance was a critical predictor of successful completion in military training courses.

In another study undertaken by Nakkas, Annen, & Brand (2016) to evaluated the stress levels of 675 Swiss armed forces prior to training, using the Symptom Distress Checklist (SCL-90) to compare training performance of army recruits with their stress levels. The results concluded that the army recruits recommended for promotion exhibited less psychological distress in the SCL – 90 ratings.

The application of psychological tests in the evaluation of stress levels among army personnel is quite historic and long established. Instruments like the Symptom Checklist (SCC), Diagnostic of Statistical Manual of Mental Disorders (DSM), Posttraumatic stress disorder Keane Scale (PKS), Organisational Frustration Scale (OFS) and death anxiety (DAS) amongst other similar tests have often been used for research, diagnosis and treatment of variety of stress and stress-related disorders commonly experienced by army personnel. In the course of their operation (LeardMann, McMaster, Warner, Esquivel, Powell, Tu, Lee, Rull & Hope, 2021; Wilkins, Lang & Norman, 2011, Zhao, Feng & Yang, 2019,)

Zhao et al (2019) in a cross – temporal media-analysis a study on the stress levels of active Chinese army personnel which lasted 24 years illustrated the efficacy of SCL in measuring stress levels in military personnel. (73.8% Army representation) on different treatment plans and offered valuable insights into the mental state of army personnel being affected by certain environments or events and validating the effectiveness of therapeutic treatment of stress in the military. Kibble (2019) evaluated the psychological profit of 42 active army personnel with the aim of expanding intra psychic sources and anxiety relating to trauma like fear of death amongst active military personnel in relation to post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD) the results show positive correlation between participants scores on the Death Anxiety Scale.

It is therefore hypothesized that there will significant difference in the dimension of stress between the categories examined in the study.

## II. METHOD

### Participants

One hundred and fifty Army Personnel made-up of 50 serving combat personnel (SCP), 50 serving Artisan Personnel (SAP) and 50 Retired Mixed Personnel (RMP) were used for the study. They were randomly selected from the Army units located in Lagos, Kaduna, Jaji and Minna.

### Instruments

#### i. Symptom Distress Checklist (SCL – 90)

The 90 item inventory was developed by Derogatis, Lipman & Covi (1977) to measure 10 primary but different clinical dimensions or categories of distress.

(A) Somatization: (bodily pains, discomfort, and dysfunction), (B) Obsessive-compulsive: (irresistible thoughts, impulses and action), (c) interpersonal sensitivity (discomfort in social situations, (D) depression, loss of vital energy, interest and motivation, (E) Anxiety (restlessness, nervousness and tension (F) Hostility (feelings of anger, hatred, depression and unfriendliness (G) Phobic anxiety (irritational fears and avoidance of objects, places and situations, (H) Paranoid ideation(suspiciousness, distrustful and blaming others, (I) Psychoticism (hallucinations, delusions and externally manipulated thoughts, (J) Neuroticism (poor sleep and appetite, feeling of unwellness.

The test has alpha reliability coefficient ranging from 77 for psychoticism to 90 for depression. The test- retest reliability coefficient range from 78 for hostility to 90 for phobic anxiety. Erinoso (1996) report concurrent validity coefficient between retirement stress inventory and SCL – 90 which range from 26 for hostility to 47 for sleep disorder with Nigerian samples.

### Procedure

The tests were administered to the participants in their various military units. The five tests were arranged in the order of SCL 90, PKS, MSI, OFS AND DAS. This order was based on the number of items in each test, the lengthy ones coming before the shorter ones when motivation is highest.

## III. RESULTS

The study investigated dimensions of stress among Retired Mixed Personnel (RMP), Serving Combat Personnel (SCP) and Serving Artisan Personnel (SAP) to determine if there is any significant differences between the three groups, in hostility and paranoid ideation  $F(5, 294) = 5.598, p = 0.001$ . The table below explains the mean difference, and standard deviation.

**Table I The Mean and S.D of the results in Hostility**

	M	SD
RMP	8.18	3.228
SCP	4.52	5.319
SAP	5.50	6.399

**Table II: Mean and SD of the result on paranoid ideation**

	M	SD
RMP	9.34	4.583
SCP	7.04	4.642
SAP	6.42	5.002

## IV. Discussion

The study accesses some dimension of stress in the Nigeria Army personnel. Three categories in the Nigerian Army were utilized for the study namely, Serving Combat Personnel (SCP), Serving Artisan Personnel (SAP) and Retired Mixed Personnel (RMP). Significant differences were observed among the three groups. The RMP showed significantly higher levels of stress among the three groups in hostility and paranoid ideation. This finding is in line with the findings of (Figley & Eiesenhart, 1975; Gurvits, Kuhnne, Orr Pitman 1994) which reported that Vietnam veterans exhibited higher levels in PTSD than non- veterans. It is interesting to note that the RMP manifested significantly higher level of stress than the SCP. The general perception is that the SCP who are presently engaged in many military operations in Nigeria would exhibit more stress than the two other group. An examination of hostility which was significant indicates feelings of anger, hatred, depression and unfriendliness. The RMP in the Nigeria Army has been having serious difficulties with their retirement and pension benefits. This has brought untold hardship and confrontation with the Nigerian Army Pension Office. The problem is lingering and not yet solved. Most of them have turned the entrance to the pension office their homes asking for solution to the problem. The Nigerian Army tried to deal with the problem but have not been completely successful. This would have contributed to the high levels of hostility exhibited by this group.

There is also the perception that the Nation they served for so many years with their lives abandoned them. They abhor the dehumanizing way they were treated by the Nigerian Army.

The RMP also showed significant differences in paranoid ideation which signifies manifestation of suspiciousness, distrustfulness and blaming others. These indicated that the RMP look at the pension office with suspicious and distrust. Often complaints are heard about the pension office requesting for document

from the RMP before their papers are processed. To RMP group, these requests are ploys to deny them of getting their benefit. They assert that after serving for many years with documentation, what further documents the pension office will need. This position is understandable considering that a large number of this group that are not literate.

Most importantly, it is when personnel retired from the military that they begin to feel the effect of years of combat operations and experience PTSD. This is a debilitating problem among retired veterans. They begin to experience some symptoms which was not there while they were serving or may not have manifested. Such symptoms include flashback, guilt and anxiety. Unfortunately the Nigerian Army have not come to terms with these psychological problem prevalent in most military units throughout the country. Not much has been done to address the retirement requirements of their personnel by establishing centers that can cater for their rehabilitation and retirement needs.

Without education and further training, most of the retired personnel cannot fit into jobs after retirement. Not finding job and still having to cater for the family increased stress levels in RMP. There are not veteran recreation centers where these RMP can visit and relieve pressure. Because the military is a closed profession, associating with the general population is often difficult and challenging and adaption hard for retired personnel.

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