



Resilience Resources Influencing Coping Strategies Adopted among Transferred Nigeria Police Officers

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ABSTRACT

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Relocation is an inherent aspect of the professional life of Nigeria police officers, often necessitated by the demands of maintaining law and order. This article explores the coping strategies adopted by transferred Nigeria police officers to deal with relocation stress, emphasising the role of resilience resources in shaping these strategies. It draws from existing literature and empirical research to shed light on the factors that contribute to the successful adaptation of officers facing the challenges of relocation. 394 transferred police officers were administered with measures of hardiness, optimism and the Brief COPE inventory. Based on regression path analyses the findings suggest that resilience resources inform the adoption of adaptive and problem-focused coping strategies; while decreasing the use of avoidant and emotion-focused coping strategies used to deal with relocation stress. The need for interventions focused on resiliency training, teaching of self-efficacy and problem-solving skills for transferred/posted/deployed police officers is underscored. The limitations of the study are also highlighted.

Keywords: *Coping strategies, Hardiness, Optimism, Transferred Police Officers*

Introduction

Relocation is a stressful event that can have a significant impact on individuals and families. For police officers, relocation can be especially challenging due to the demanding nature of their work and the need to maintain a high level of performance. Relocation is a recurrent experience for Nigeria police officers, as they are often transferred to different locations as part of their duties. While this aspect of the job is necessary for maintaining law and order, it can be a source of significant stress for officers and their families. Nelson (2017) pointed out that transfers, deployment, and posting could be a stressful experience for affected officers and these also constitute stressors for police officers in Nigeria as reported by John-Akinola et al. (2020). However, studies on how police officers cope with relocation stress is scant. This present study attempts to fill this gap by delineating two resilience resources that informs the coping strategies adopted by transferred, posted and deployed to deal with relocation stress.

Police stress literature is replete with coping strategies engaged by police officers to deal with the varying stressors they confront on a daily basis in the line of duty and off duty (e.g., Zulkafaly et al., 2017; Misis, 2012; Tshababa, et al., 2019). Coping strategies indicate the specific behavioural and psychological efforts that people adopt to overcome, adjust to, and reduce the effects of stressful experiences (Carver, 2020; Drapeau et al., 2017). These coping strategies range from those that have been considered to be functional and adaptive (e.g., Mushwana et al., 2019; Mrevlje & Erčulj, 2021; Ermasova et al., 2020) to others that have been deemed maladaptive and dysfunctional (e.g., Pastwa-Wojciechowska & Piotrowski, 2016; Singo & Shilubane, 2022; Violanti et al., 2011) within police samples.

In addition, several factors have been attributed to the adoption of specific coping strategies by individuals while dealing with stress. Particularly, personality factors are considered in individuals' response to stress (Liu et al., 2021; Luo et al., 2022). In police samples the neurotic personality has been implicated in the adoption of maladaptive coping strategies to deal with stress (Naik & Kacker, 2019; Oluwafemi et al., in press). Nonetheless, personal traits such as those that predisposes to the adoption of adaptive coping strategies and reduction of maladaptive coping strategies are yet to be portrayed in police officers' efforts to deal with relocation stress. Relocation stress is a psychological and emotional response that occurs when police officers are required to move from one location to another due to changes in their job assignments, hence coping strategies are needed to deal with this stressor and these can be linked to individual resilience resources.

The Lazarus transactional model of stress and coping (Lazarus, 1991; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) guides this study. This theory posit that, though most stressors produce two types of coping, problem-focused which seems to dominate when individuals believe something positive or constructive can be done about the stressful occurrence; and emotion-focused coping, employed most times when individuals feel that the stressor is something to be endured. Avoidant coping was later introduced to categorise strategies used by

individuals to evade or circumvent the stressor (Carver et al., 1989). This theory extends that when psychological strain or stress results then some form of coping is set off by the officer experiencing the relocation stress. During the initiation of varying methods of coping, cognitive appraisal is key and this will depend on the resilience resources inherent in the officer. For instance, an officer who is hardy may engage coping strategies geared towards problem solving and engage less in avoidant or maladaptive coping strategies. Similarly, an officer who possess enormous optimism could use adaptive and functional coping strategies. Officers who are neither optimistic nor hardy may use emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies.

Personal resilience resources such as hardiness and optimism have been found to be associated with coping strategies adopted to deal with stress among varying populations. Hardiness has been found to be positively associated with problem-focused coping (Jamal et al., 2017; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014; Vagni et al., 2020, 2022), and negatively related to avoidant coping (Jamal et al., 2017; Sagone & De Caroli, 2014; Vagni et al., 2020). These findings suggest that hardy individuals are more likely to engage more of adaptive and functional coping strategies and less of maladaptive coping strategies while dealing with stress. Optimism has also been found to be inversely related to avoidant coping (Smida et al., 2021); and it is positively related to problem-focused coping and negatively related to emotion-focused coping (Agbaria & Abu Mokh, 2022). Santos et al. (2022) likewise reported that higher levels of optimism was associated with more adaptive coping, but an insignificant negative relationship with maladaptive coping.

Within the police stress literature, rarely has there been a study focused on the coping strategies engaged by police officers to deal with relocation stress, neither has any study known to the authors examined the relationship of resilience resources such as hardiness and optimism with the coping strategies adopted to deal with this stressor. This study aims to fill this gap. To this end, two hypotheses are put forward:

1. Optimism will influence coping strategies adopted to deal with relocation stress by transferred police officers.
2. Hardiness will influence coping strategies adopted to deal with relocation stress by transferred police officers.

Method

Design

This study is a cross-sectional quantitative survey which engaged a correlational design.

Population

The population for the study is the Nigeria police officers who have experienced relocation stress resulting from their being either transferred, posted or redeployed within the last 18 months.

Participants

The sample size for the study is 394 police officers. The police officers' average age is 36.14 years with a standard deviation of 9.443, ranging from 21 years to 59 years. Their average tenure on the job is 13.09 years with a standard deviation of 8.529, ranging from 2 years to 34 years. Female police officers are 130 (33%) and male police officers are 264 (67%). 148 (37.56%) are single; 238 (60.41%) are married; and 8 (2.03%) are divorced. 44 (11.2%) are Constables; 38 (9.6%) are Corporals; 78 (19.8%) are Sergeants; 64 (16.2%) are Inspectors; 99 (25.1%) are Assistant Superintendents of Police; 37 (9.4%) are Deputy Superintendents of Police; 14 (3.6%) are Superintendents of Police; 13 (3.3%) are Chief Superintendents of Police; 5 (1.3%) are Assistant Commissioners of Police; and 2 (.5%) are Commissioners of Police.

Sampling Technique and Procedure

Precisely, a multi- (stage) sampling method was engaged in the selection of participants for this study. First, the cluster sampling technique was engaged because from clusters of six-geopolitical zones two police states commands were randomly selected from each cluster. Secondly, the systematic sampling technique was then used to draw police officers who have recently experienced transfer, postings and/or deployment in the last 18 months. Every third officers on the lists of recently transferred/posted/deployed at every police formation visited by the researchers were administered with the study's questionnaires.

Research Instruments

Hardiness: The Dispositional Resilience Scale (DRS-15) is a 15-item measure of hardiness developed by Bartone (1995). The scale has three sub-dimensions of commitment, control and challenge, with each sub-dimension having 5 items. Example of items are: "*How things go in my life depends on my own actions*" (control sub-dimension); "*Most days, life is really interesting and exciting for me*" (commitment sub-dimension); and "*Changes in routine are interesting to me*" (challenge sub-dimension). Respondents are required to indicate agreement on a four-point scale (where 0 = *not at all true*; 1 = *a little true*; 2 = *quite true*; and 3 = *completely true*). The scale contains six items that are negatively keyed or reversed scored. Vagni et al. (2020) reported a Cronbach's α of .73 for the scale. In this study a Cronbach's α of .78 was obtained.

Optimism: This study adopted the nine (9) items from the Personal Optimism and Social Optimism – Extended scale (POSO-E questionnaire) developed by Schweizer and Koch (2001) that were selected by Gavrilov-Jerkovic et al. (2014). Gavrilov-Jerkovic et al. shortened the POSO-E to a 4-item personal optimism and a 5-item self-efficacy optimism scale which serves as a measure of two types of positive expectations. Items are rated on a 5-point Likert scale ranging from 1 = "*Strongly Disagree*" to 5 = "*Strongly Agree*". An example of item on the personal optimism dimension is: "*I am facing my future in an optimistic way*". An example of item on the self-efficacy optimism dimension is: "*For each problem I will find a solution*". Ugwu and Igbende (2017) obtained a Cronbach's α of .75 among a sample of Nigerian employees. In this study a Cronbach's α of .72 was obtained.

Coping Strategies Scale: The Brief Coping Orientation to Problems Experienced (Brief COPE) Inventory developed by Carver (1997) is used to assess coping strategies in this study. The scale is a twenty-eight (28)-item abridged version of an earlier one constructed by Carver et al. (1989) designed to assess the varying coping strategies used by individuals in response to stress and the degree to which a respondent utilises a specific coping strategy. It assesses fourteen (14) of such coping strategies viz: Self-distraction, active coping, denial, substance use, use of emotional support, use of instrumental support, behavioural disengagement, venting, positive reframing, planning, humour, acceptance, religion, and self-blame. Every coping strategy consists of two items and is rated using a four-point Likert-type response scale that ranges from “*I haven't been doing this at all*” (Score 1) to “*I have been doing this a lot*” (Score 4). Participants were asked to indicate the extent to which they have been using any of these coping strategies to deal with their experience of relocation stress. High score on a particular coping strategy suggests the use of such coping behaviour by the officer and low score suggest the non-use of such coping behaviour when dealing with relocation stress. In this study, the Cronbach's alphas α for the coping strategies ranged from .49 to .92.

Data analysis

Because the data were collected in a paper and pencil format, the data were examined for extreme values using boxplots for each item. After that, the data were tested for violation of normality using histogram, normality curve, Kolmogorov-Sminov and Shapiro Wilk's test to determine that the data can use parametric analytical test. Data were analysed using AMOS (Version 23) for the regression path analyses.

Results

Figure 1 depicts the standardised regression weights obtained as coping strategies were regressed on both optimism and hardiness using AMOS (Version 23) statistical software. The reflected paths are those that showed significance at $p \leq .05$. For hypothesis one, active and planning coping strategies were positively associated with optimism, such that when optimism goes up by one standard deviation, active and planning coping strategies goes up by .27 and .16 standard deviations respectively. Conversely, significant negative relationships were observed between optimism and some maladaptive coping strategies. Specifically, when optimism goes up by one standard deviation, self-distraction, substance use, denial, venting, behavioural disengagement, self-blame, humour and acceptance goes down by .29, .13, .33, .18, .38, .13, .18 and .27 standard deviations respectively. These findings support hypothesis one, optimism does influence these coping strategies.

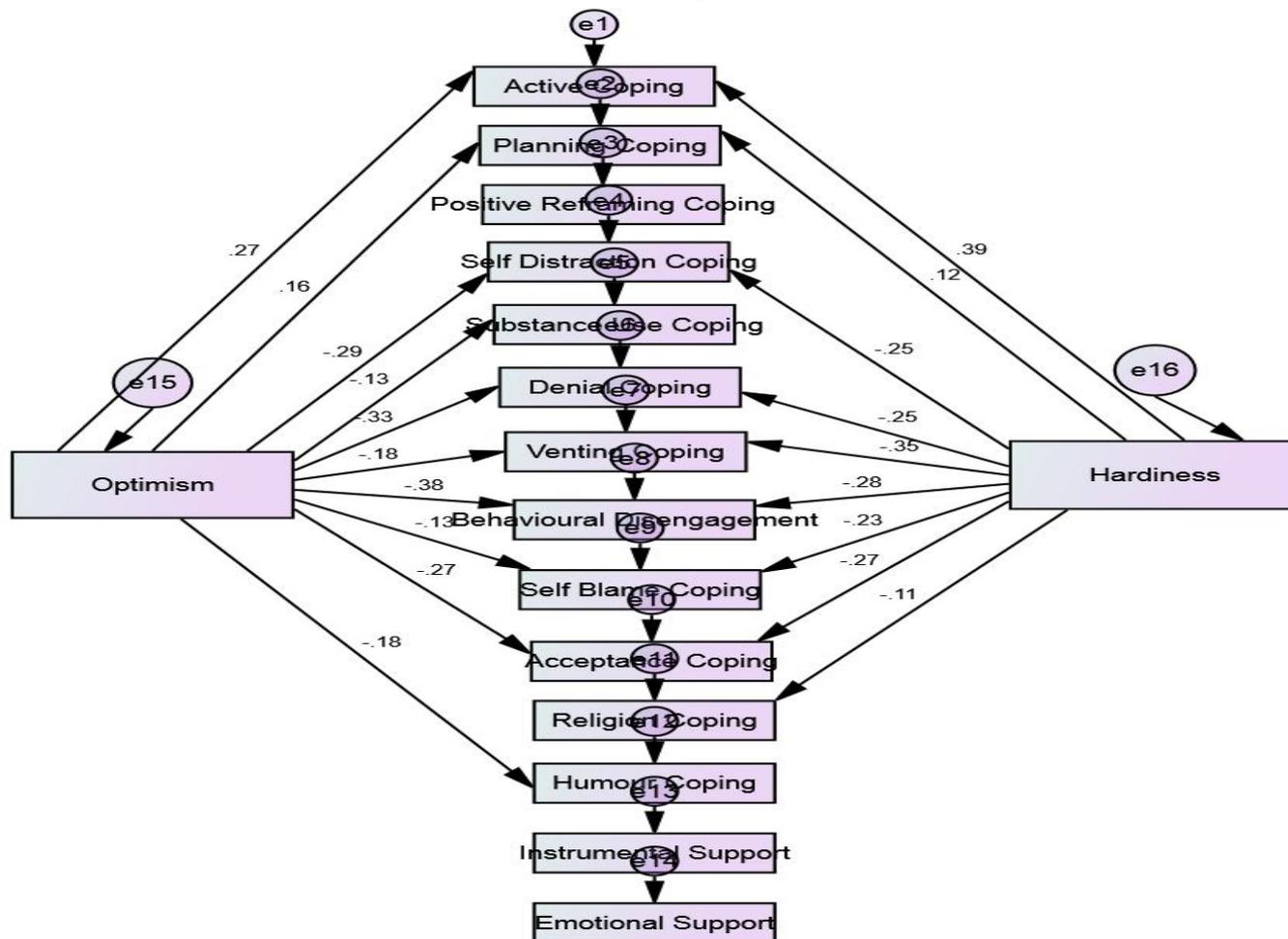


Figure 1: The Regression Weights of the Influence of Optimism and Hardiness on Coping Strategies Adopted by Transferred Police Officers to Deal with Relocation Stress.

For hypothesis two, active and planning coping strategies were positively associated with hardiness, such that when hardiness goes up by one standard deviation active and planning coping strategies goes up by .39 and .12 standard deviations respectively. On the other hand, significant negative relationships were observed between hardiness and a couple of maladaptive coping strategies. Specifically, when hardiness goes up by one standard deviation, self-distraction, denial, venting, behavioural disengagement, self-blame, acceptance and religion goes down by .25, .25, .35, .28, .23, .27, and .11 respectively. These findings support hypothesis two, hardiness does influence these coping strategies.

Discussion

The findings in this study are in tandem with previous studies on the relationship between the resilience resources of optimism and hardiness, and coping strategies adopted to deal with various forms of stressors. In particular, this study focused on coping with relocation stress as experienced by transferred/posted/deployed Nigeria police officers. The results of the study showed that resilience resources were significantly associated with coping strategies. Specifically, officers with higher levels of resilience

resources reported using more active coping strategies (e.g., active, planning) and fewer avoidance and maladaptive coping strategies (e.g., denial, venting, self-distraction).

Given that active and planning coping strategies have been classified as problem-focused coping, the study supports the findings by Agbaria and Abu Mokh (2022) that optimism is positively associated with problem-focused coping. Agbaria and Abu Mokh, and Smida et al. (2021) also observed that optimism is negatively related to emotion-focused and avoidant coping strategies respectively. It is noteworthy that Jamal et al. (2022) categorised humour coping as an avoidant coping strategy alongside behavioural disengagement, denial and venting of emotions as categorised by Carver et al. (1989); and Carver et al. also theoretically classified acceptance coping as emotion-focused. These two categories of coping strategies showed significant negative relationship with optimism in this present study and further strengthens the findings of Agbaria and Mokh, and Smida et al.

The influence of hardiness on coping strategies also showed similar pattern as that of optimism has found in this study. Jamal et al. (2017), Sagone and De Caroli (2014), and Vagni et al. (2020, 2022) observed that hardiness was positively related to problem-focused coping and this was also the finding of this study. Hardiness was positively associated with active and planning coping strategies. On the other hand, Jamal et al., Sagone and De Caroli, and Vagni et al. (2020) did report that hardiness shared negative relationship with avoidant and emotion-focused coping strategies, this was also supported by findings in this study. Self-distraction, denial, behavioural disengagement, venting, self-blame (avoidant coping strategies), religion and acceptance (emotion-focused coping strategies) all showed significant negative relationship with the resilience resource of hardiness.

The findings of the current study add to the growing body of literature on the factors that influence coping with relocation stress. The findings suggest that resilience resources such as optimism and hardiness can play an important role in helping police officers cope with the stress of relocation. Officers with lower levels of resilience resources may need more support and guidance in coping with the challenges of relocation. Interventions that focus on increasing resilience resources, such as resilience training, teaching of self-efficacy and problem-solving skills, may be beneficial for helping police officers adjust to new assignments. This training programme can be implemented before the initiation of transfer, posting, and deployment of police officers across the country as this can help officers cope better with the stress of relocation.

In conclusion, relocation stress is an inherent challenge faced by Nigeria police officers, but it can be effectively managed through the adoption of appropriate coping strategies. This article has highlighted the significance of resilience resources of hardiness and optimism in shaping officers' responses to relocation stress. By recognising and fostering these resources, police authority can better support their transferred officers, ultimately contributing to their well-being and the effectiveness of law enforcement efforts in Nigeria.

The current study has several limitations. First the study did not consider that the impact of relocation stress on police officers may be influenced by a number of factors, such as the length of the relocation, the distance of the move, and the individual's personal circumstances. It is important to consider these factors in future studies focused on police officers who are experiencing relocation stress. Second, the study used self-report measures to assess resilience resources and coping strategies. These measures could be susceptible to bias, hence future studies should use qualitative measures to assess these constructs including in-depth interviews. Third, the study did not examine the causal relationship between resilience resources and coping strategies. Future studies should use longitudinal designs to examine this relationship.

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