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WORKPLACE ENVIRONMENTAL FACTORS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT AMONG ACADEMIC STAFF OF FEDERAL UNIVERSITIES IN SOUTH- WEST, NIGERIA

By

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Abstract

Most academic staff have been found to be experiencing high level of stress, arising from long working hours, increased job demands, lack of control over work-pace and imbalanced work-life relationships. These in turns lead to feelings of worry, anxiety, anger, frustration, depression, high rates of hospitalisation and sudden deaths, and low performance. Previous studies have attempted to address this problem using mostly psychological and medical interventions with little emphasis on the degree of assistance available within the social and institutional networks in the university work environment. The study, therefore, examined the combined influence of workplace environmental factors (work load, role ambiguity/conflict and class size), social (career advice, connectedness and provision of feedbacks) and institutional (research assistance, promotion, collegiality, protection, friendship and opportunity) supports on the management of stress among academic staff in federal universities in the South-west, Nigeria. This study adopted the descriptive survey design. Four of the oldest federal universities in the South-west were purposively selected. Two research hypotheses were tested for the study at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient and, Multiple Regression. Effective social support system coupled with opportunities for promotion and research assistance as well as availability of flexible work load positively determined the management of stress among academic staff in federal universities in the South-west, Nigeria. There is the need to improve upon the social supports while effective institutional supports should be provided to enhance the stress management system among the academic staff. In addition conducive and flexible work environment should be ensured.

Keywords: Nigerian federal universities, Academic staff, Stress management, Workplace environmental factors.

Introduction

Stress according to the Health and Safety Executive (2002) is the adverse reaction of people to excessive pressure or other types of demand placed on them. It occurs when a person is confronted with situations he/she cannot cope with. The Health and Information Publication (2005) view stress as the emotional and physical strain caused by one's response to the outside world. To Stoanes, Blaney, Wood and Wilkins (2003), it is something that causes bodily, mental or emotional strain. Stress is therefore any condition that disturbs or offsets the normal working of an individual whether it is physical, emotional or psychological.

Stress occurs in everyday life; in our homes, at work, in the family, in the market place, in fact in all walks of life or in all aspects of our life. Stress is part of everyday life and it arises as a result of our relationship with the constantly changing world (Rok, 2011). There is good and bad stress; suggesting it could also be positive or negative. Stress is positive when it is moderate. Such stress is necessary in stimulating and motivating alertness to provide the needed incentive to surmount challenges at the workplace, such stress is positive and motivational. In this case, deadlines are met and workers are motivated to achieve set objectives. When stress becomes extreme and persists for a long time, it becomes negative. It can lead to feelings of worry, anxiety, anger, fear and frustration which could have a damaging effect on the individuals' health and lead to poor performance at work. Such health hazards as high blood pressure, heart diseases, stroke, ulcer, body pain, persistent headache or migraine and other illnesses could occur as a result of stress.

In Nigeria, to the best of the researcher's knowledge, few studies have been carried out on stress among teachers whether in the secondary schools or tertiary institutions. The presumption is that there is the incidence of stress among secondary school teachers in Nigeria. Although the incidence of stress among lecturers in Nigeria has not reached a devastating dimension, it is approaching it. According to Denga (1986), "the lecturer slept and did not wake up" are some of the campus stories which signal the manifestations of stress and hypertension.

A number of research findings have documented that, prolonged stress has negative effects on individual health (Kester, Oni & Ogidan, 2010) as well as employees' attitudes towards the organisation. Researchers have estimated that several millions of working days are lost to stress-related problems (American Psychological Association, 2004). According to Khaibi, Asadi and Hamidi (2009), the overall cost of stress at work are about 20 billion Euros in the European Union (EU) and more than 150 billion dollars in US, mainly for health care and treatment costs, absenteeism and turnover. Kazmi, Amjad and Khan (2008) submit that, stress is more likely in some situations than others and in certain individuals than others. There are many challenges in the academic work environment, characterised by excessive workloads, increased use of computer, desire for career advancement and pursuit for academic excellence among others result in high job stress among Nigerian university teachers. Stress affects not only our physical health but our mental wellbeing. To successfully manage stress in everyday lives, individual can learn to relax and enjoy life. The best way to manage stress is to prevent it; this may not be always possible. The best approach to manage it is to reduce stress and make life easier.

Stress refers to any environmental, organizational and individual or internal demands, which require the individual to readjust his/her usual behavioural pattern. Degree of stress results from events or situations that have potential to cause change. Stimuli or situations that can result in the experience of stress are called stressors. There are three major sources of stress, namely environmental, individual and organisational. Environmental stress is not only caused by the factors intrinsic to job, but also influenced by the environmental or extra organisational factors. Stress results because of the individual's interaction with environmental stimuli or factors such as societal or technological changes, political and economic uncertainties, and financial condition and community conditions. The stress which an individual experiences in an environment is carried with him/her to another environment also. Thus, increasing the stress and causing stress to others. There are many factors at the level of individuals which may generate stress in the context of organisational and career change, personality types, and role characteristics. Any change in career life of an individual puts him/her in disequilibrium state of affairs and he/she is required to be at equilibrium state. In this process, the individual experiences stress.

Working under continuously stressful conditions for most academic staff, can lead to the dissatisfaction and exhaustion in most universities in Nigeria (Aladejana, Aladejana and Ehindero, (2006) as well as Ofoegbu and Nwadiani, 2006). The stressful conditions academic staffs are exposed to, can also affect their work-related and physiological wellbeing.

In view of the importance of lecturers in the manpower development of a country, and paucity of study on stress among lecturers, there is the need to investigate the stress experienced by them and the coping methods they often adopt in dealing with stressors. Knowledge of the sources of stress among lecturers and their coping methods will help in formulating the appropriate intervention strategies and management techniques for minimising stress among academic staff in Nigeria.

Over time, the management of stress among the academic staff is more on the use of individual coping strategies and medical interventions. It is even more on the individuals because prevention programmes are viewed as the most common stress management interventions because they are aimed at individuals and involve instruction in techniques to manage and cope with stress. Examples are cognitive-behavioural skill training, meditation, relaxation, deep breathing, exercise, journaling, time management and goal setting. Majority of lecturers may not have engaged in physical exercises or watch films in order to manage any stressful situations, rather, may prefer to keep away from situations that could cause stress; while active cognitive strategies may rarely be used by lecturers.

The broad aim of this paper is to investigate workplace environmental factors and stress management among academic staff of federal universities in the south-west Nigeria.

Statement of the Problem

In the pursuit of academic excellence, increased use of computerisation and desire for career advancement, most academic staff has been found to be vulnerable to high level of stress, mostly linked to working for long hours, an increased intensity of academic job demands, lack of control over the pace of work and imbalance between work and personal responsibilities. This often leads to feelings of worry, anxiety, anger, fear, frustration and depression, with damaging effect on the health of lecturers leading to poor performance at work.

Available records revealed that, Nigerian universities are hard hit as evidence by the number of high ranking teaching staff lost to sudden death and high rate of hospitalisation. It is recently revealed in the University of Ibadan health services, that a number of lecturers from various faculties and departments suffered stress-related illness such as depression, high blood pressure, hearts diseases, stroke, ulcer, body pain and persistent headache or migraine. There are evidences that if the stressful working conditions to which academic staff is exposed are not properly managed, the quality of their academic work, their overall performance and wellbeing, will have serious adverse effect on the university output and image.

The results of poor stress management among academic staff in the university can have serious implications on the educational system and even the process of socio-economic development of the nation. It is therefore imperative to find ways to maintain good mental health among academic staff to avoid a mismatch between the demands and pressure of work on them on one hand, as well as their knowledge and abilities, on the other.

Previous studies had focused more on stress and its management among other science-oriented professionals, with little consideration for the academic staff in the Nigerian university system. This study, therefore, investigates the extent to which workplace environmental factors, social and institutional supports tend to influence stress management among academic staff in federal universities.

The broad objective is to investigate the effects of workplace environmental factors and stress management among academic staff of federal universities in the south-west Nigeria.

The specific objectives of the study are to:

- i. determine the extent to which workplace environmental factors influence stress management among academic staff in federal universities.

- ii. assess the relationship between each of the workplace environmental factors and stress management among academic staff.

Hypotheses

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between each of the environmental factors and stress management among academic staff.

Ho₂: There is no significant differences between stress level of academic staff based on job tenure, sex, rank, faculties and universities sampled

Methodology

The target population comprised all the academic staff in the federal universities in South- West, Nigeria. These set of staff were from assistant lecturers to professors, who are saddled with large volume of academic responsibilities than non-academic staff and the productivity of these staff determines to a large extent the level of development of the nation. The academic staff strength of the universities used for the study are; university of Ibadan (1,549), university of Lagos (1213), Obafemi Awolowo university (1453) and the Federal university of Agriculture Abeokuta (564). The study employed the multi-stage sampling technique in the selection of the respondents. These include the use of the purposive sampling technique to select four federal universities in the South-West, namely, University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (UNILAG), ObafemiAwolowo University (OAU) and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAB).The sample size was first determined from Academic staff strength using RaoSoft online sample size calculator (Raosoft Inc, 2004) Data collected were presented and analysed using frequency counts, percentages, means, Pearson Product Moment Correlation and Multiple Regressions analysis.

Findings

Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between each of the environmental factors and stress management among academic staff.

Table 4.1: Pearson Correlation on the Relationship between Workplace Environmental Factors and Stress Management among Academic Staff in Federal Universities

	Mean	S.D	Pearson r	Sig.	Remark
Stress Management	119.74	15.95			
Workload	19.05	3.76	-.09**	<.05	Significant
Role Ambiguity/ Role Conflict	16.19	2.87	-.04	>.05	N.S
Class Size	13.67	3.16	-.03	>.05	N.S

** . Correlation is significant at the 001 level (2-tailed).

Field survey, 2011

Interpretation and Discussion

The results on relationship between workplace environmental factors and stress management among academic staff in federal universities obtained from the analysis as shown in Table 4.2b, reveal that, there is significant inverse relationship between work overload ($r = -.09, p < .05$) and work stress management among academic staff.

There is no significant relationship between role ambiguity and role conflict($r = -.04, p > .05$) and class size ($r = .03, p > .05$).These results imply that, increase in work overload did not relate to poor and low effectiveness of stress management among academic staff in the federal universities sampled in this study. The null hypothesis states that, there will be no significant relationship between each of the environmental factors and stress management among academic staff. The null hypothesis was rejected and the alternate hypothesis accepted. This findings support studies that identified that, when academia face serious stress they tend to utilise different coping strategies. Senior academics tend to have more responsibilities, pressure and

work overload because of mentorship and social support expectation from their junior colleagues (Winfield, Gillespie, Stough, Dua, Hapuarachchi, and Boyd, 2003). In particular, Winter, Taylor and Sarros (2000) find professors and associate professors reported more work overload than junior lecturers did. Further, the study supports Winefield, Gillespie, Stough and Dua (2002), who found that, as occupational levels increased, so did working hours for associate professors and professors, who reported an average of 55–56 hours per week. Also, the finding supports Salami (2006) who notes that, heavy workload, working under pressure, large classes, and students’ disruption of lectures, delayed and inadequate salaries were the major sources of stress among college of education lecturers in Nigeria. An explanation for this finding is that, there are certain issues in the lecturers’ job that were of more concern, stress and eventually burnout. This was expressed in the interview with a senior lecturer:

Lecturers’ job are major sources of stress because of workload, inordinate timing of activities, poor working conditions, and lack of facilities and students’ over population. The inability to manage these challenges often lead to stress and burnout.

Another respondent noted that:

“Many lecturers don’t have the time to do most of their work”. This work lack acknowledgement and too many deadlines to meet as such people doing this work faces different challenges from health to family issues. The system should acknowledge our effort and give more training on management and education about stress. Introducing relaxation strategies such as yoga, meditation and a tea room will go a long way to reduce the stress of the staff.

Table 4.2: Pearson Correlation on Relationship between Workplace Environmental Factors and Stress Management among Academic Staff of some selected Federal Universities in Southwest Nigeria.

Variables	ABEOKU TA		IFE		IBADA N		LAGO S	
	r	Sig.	r	Sig.	R	Sig.	R	Sig.
Workload	-.13*	<.05	0.00	>.05	-.14*	<.05	0.12	>.05
Role Ambiguity/Role Conflict	-.21**	<.05	-.32**	<.05	-.41**	<.05	0.05	>.05
Class Size	-.14*	<.05	0.09	>.05	-.18**	<.05	0.02	>.05

** . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

* . Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

Interpretation and Discussion

The results from Table 4.2, reveals that, for Abeokuta (FUNAB), there is significant inverse relationship between workload ($r=-.13, p<.05$), role ambiguity/role conflict ($r=-.21, p<.05$), class size ($r=-.14, p<.05$) and work stress management. The result indicates that increase in workload is significantly related to poor and low effectiveness of the work stress management strategies. For Ife (OAU), there is significant inverse relationship between role ambiguity/role conflict ($r=-.32, p<.05$) and work stress. This indicates that decrease in role ambiguity/role conflict significantly related to effectiveness in the work stress management strategies.

The result of the Academic staff in the University of Ibadan (UI) reveals that, there is significant inverse relationship between workload ($r=-.14, p<.05$), role ambiguity/role conflict ($r=-.41, p<.05$) and class size ($r=-.18, p<.05$), indicating that, increase workload significantly relate to effectiveness in the work stress management strategies. While for Lagos (UNILAG), there is no significant positive relationship between workload ($r=.12, p>.05$), role ambiguity/role conflict($r=.05, p>.05$), class size ($r=.02, p>.05$) and effectiveness in the work stress management strategies. Implying that, increase or decrease in workload, role ambiguity/role conflict and class size relate significantly with increase in the effectiveness in the work stress management strategies. Though overall in the initial analysis these variables were not significant but became

significant when the respondents from different schools were added together. This shows that overall class size, role ambiguity and conflict may not be a major factor in the level of effective stress management. That is class size and role conflict and ambiguity may be outside the purview of individual lecturer and directly managed by the universities authorities. When broken down, variations across the different universities become more easily noticeable due to the policies and management styles of the universities as lecturers from Abeokuta and Ibadan tend to exhibit less effective stress coping strategies due to increasing number of students, role conflicts and oversubscribed courses. This confirms the trend identified by Tetey (2009) that huge expansions in student enrolment are increasingly overwhelming African institutions without a corresponding increase in academic staff capacity. Even when the universities establish new positions to meet increasing enrolments, many of these posts are not filled.

The capacity deficit means that vacancy rates in university staff positions frequently run between 25 and 50% (World Bank, 2008). Avoiding role stagnation by allowing faculty members work on different projects or with different publics would also reduce emotional exhaustion. The increasing student-staff ratios, outlined in the national and institutional profiles, present a daunting challenge to the professoriate as a whole, but particularly so at stages of any lecturer's career. The workload that accompanies responsibility for large student numbers imposes significant career-stalling burdens on junior lecturers (Archibong, Ogbiji, & Anijaobi-Idem, 2010). The anxiety that comes with such a burden, in a context that demands high standards of research productivity, can discourage potential academics. To address this concern, institutions need to provide relief to those in the early stages of their careers while helping them gain skills needed to meet career expectations.

Student-staff ratios remained constant at a highly creditable average rate of 50:1 across universities they were able to maintain this ratio only by cutting down on enrolments by significant margins at a time when tertiary institutions were losing academic staff. For student-staff ratios to remain at existing levels, student enrolment had to decrease by 21% (Tetey, 2009). This response to staff shortages and possibly other pressures, will have obvious implications for student's access to higher education, at a time when millions of qualified students were denied admission to Nigerian universities (Punch, 2008). This finding is similar to that of Bakare (2013) who concludes that workload and increasing students' population play significant role in lecturer's leisure patterns adaptation. He emphasises the necessity for the integration of leisure counselors into the education system. Bakare (2013) identifies that, though many of the lecturers were aware of leisure facilities on their campuses as well as the benefits of leisure, some claim to be near to these facilities, only 47% make use of the provision due to excessive workload. This means that, though the awareness level was somewhat high, participation in leisure activities was low; some also claim not to be familiar with the leisure facilities. . It might not be all that possible for the lecturers to leave their offices at 10: 00 pm at night to engage in leisure activities. More informal social function may improve the coping strategies of lecturers. One interviewee reflected on her own wellbeing about lecturing job pace and the need to give the job a break. She felt that the government should take more responsibility of lecturers' wellbeing for example, the increasing workload without the government commensurate payment increase in excess workload allowance:

"Somebody needs to do something" about the increasing work load. Though this may differ across faculties or universities. The main challenge is not paying for the excess work load because the money do not remove the load itself rather through adequate planning and manpower development in the country. Thus there is need to convince government into building in the lecturers social life for the development of the University itself" (Female, Lecturer II, OAU, 23/11/2013).

Hypothesis Two: There is no significant differences between stress level of academic staff based on job tenure, sex, rank, faculties and universities sampled

(i) Institution will not significantly influence lecturers work stress as analysed using one-way ANOVA, the summary of the result is presented in Table below.

Table 4.3: One-way ANOVA showing the differences between work stresses based on the institution

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	9960.435	3	3320.145	13.551	<.01
Within Groups	244033.484	996	245.014		
Total	253993.919	999			

Table 4.4: Descriptive statistics showing mean difference between work stresses based on the institution

		Mean	S.D	LSD POST HOC ANALYSIS			
				1	2	3	4
FUNNAB	250	117.4800	14.63126		.82	7.26*	2.60
OAU	250	116.6520	15.41510			8.09*	3.43*
UI	250	124.7480	16.81235				4.66*
UNILAG	250	120.0840	15.67481				
Total	1000	119.7410	15.94516				

*, The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level.

Interpretation and discussion

The results in tables 4.3 and 4.4 show that there is significant effect of institution on lecturers work stress ($F(3,996) = 13.55, p < .001$), lecturers from Ibadan reported higher work stress level ($x = 124.75$) than lecturers from Ife ($x = 116.65$), Abeokuta ($x = 117.48$) and Lagos ($x = 120.08$). Descriptive analysis and post hoc analysis reveal that lecturers from Ibadan significantly reported higher work stress than lecturers from Ife, Abeokuta and Lagos. The hypothesis was rejected. This finding is in line with Barkhuizen and Rothmann (2008) who found differences in the occupational stress levels for academic staff in South African higher education institutions. Compared to the normative data, academics reported higher levels of stress relating to pay and benefits, overload and work-life balance across the Universities. Four occupational stressors, overload, job control, resources, communication as well as job characteristics contributed significantly to the commitment of academics of their institutions. The finding support Tytherleigh (2003), who find in the study of 14 United Kingdom universities and colleges that stress induced level of job commitment, perceived from and felt towards their organisations, significantly differs across universities.

(ii) Cadre will significantly influence lecturers work stress and was analysed using one-way ANOVA, the summary of the result is presented in Table 4.10.

Table 4.5: One-way ANOVA showing the differences work stress based on the cadre

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	2507.998	6	418.000	1.650	>.05
Within Groups	251485.921	993	253.259		
Total	253993.919	999			

Interpretation and discussion

The result in Table 4.5 shows no significant differences in lecturers work stress based on cadre ($F(3,996) = 1.65, p > .05$), lecturers from the lower cadre ($x = 118.75$) were not different in terms of work stress compared to senior lecturers ($x = 120.37$). The hypothesis was accepted. This is in contrast with the study of Chaudhry (2012) who finds significant high level of occupational stress across the cadre of university teachers. There was inverse relationship of job satisfaction and occupational stress in case of professors and positive relationship in case of associate professors. The finding contradicts Dua (1994) who notes that, in terms of

job cadres, junior lecturers is suffering with higher stress because of less support facilities available to them and support staff of the universities face high stress due to extensive involvement in clerical activities.

(iii) Job tenure (years of experience) will significantly influence lecturers' work stress, this was analysed using one way ANOVA and the summary of the result presented in Table 4.6(a&b).

Table 4.6a: One-way ANOVA of work stress differences based on job Tenure

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	1622.479	2	811.240	3.205	<.05
Within Groups	252371.440	997	253.131		
Total	253993.919	999			

Table 4.6b: Descriptive Statistics of work stress differences based on job Tenure

	Mean	S.D	LSD POST HOC ANALYSIS		
			1	2	3
1-5 years	173	117.0173	14.27531	3.73*	3.09**
6-10 years	253	120.7510	16.46392		.63
11 years and above	574	120.1167	16.12631		
Total	1000	119.7410	15.94516		

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Interpretation and discussion

The results in Tables 4.6a and b show that there is significant difference in lecturers work stress based on job tenure ($F(2,996) 3.20, p<.05$), lecturers in the lower tenure ($x = 117.01$) were significantly different in terms of work stress compared to senior lecturers and professors ($x = 120.11$). The hypothesis was rejected. This supports the findings of Barnes et al. (1998) on the effects of academic discipline, tenure status, and gender on job stress. Based on data from a national faculty survey of 3,070 full-time tenure-track faculties, results indicated that of the variables studied, the commitment did not moderate the stressor-intent relationship (Barnes et al., 1998).

(iv) Faculty will significantly influence lecturers' work stress as analysed using one way ANOVA and the summary of the result presented in the table below.

Table 4.7a: One-way ANOVA of work stress differences Based on Faculty

Source	SS	df	MS	F	Sig.
Between Groups	7810.728	6	1301.788	5.251	<.01
Within Groups	246183.191	993	247.919		
Total	253993.919	999			

Table 4.7b: Descriptive statistics of work stress differences based on Faculty

	N	Mean	S.D	LSD POST HOC ANALYSIS						
				1	2	3	4	5	6	7
1. Science	60	115.6500	15.66582	3.73*	6.42*	2.84*	7.36*	.89	.17	
2. Arts	121	119.3884	14.62553		2.68*	8.47*	.89	3.64*	.89	
3. Social Sciences	260	122.0769	15.67755			3.58*	.94	5.53*	6.25*	
4. Medicine	79	118.4937	15.74873				4.52*	1.94	2.66*	
5. Education	208	123.0192	17.81655					6.47*	7.19*	
6. Agriculture	226	116.5442	14.89609						.71	
7. Vet Medicine	46	115.8261	12.82065							
Total	1000	119.7410	15.94516							

*. The mean difference is significant at the 0.05 level

Interpretation and Discussion

The result in table 4.7a shows that there is significant effect of faculty on lecturers' work stress ($F(6,993) = 5.25, p < .001$), lecturers from the faculties of education ($x = 123.012$) and social sciences ($x = 122.075$) have higher stress levels compared to lecturers in the other faculties such as, sciences, medicine, vet medicine and agriculture. Descriptive analysis and post hoc analysis reveal that lecturers from education and social sciences have higher stress levels compared to lecturers in the other faculties such as, sciences, medicine, vet medicine and agriculture. The hypothesis was rejected. This finding confirms Elder (2004) where specialisation was identified as a potential moderator in the relationships between a number of occupational stressors and strain. University faculty plays a vital role in the creation and dissemination of knowledge and innovation, in addition to education and training. Above cited research demonstrated that high levels of occupational stress, if left unchecked and unmanaged it will undermine the quality, productivity and creativity of employees' work and wellbeing (Gillispie, Walsh, Winefield, Dua, and Stough, 2001).

Conclusion

Workplace environmental factors yielded a significant coefficient of multiple regressions (R) and adjusted for the universities in south-west, Nigeria. Having examined the extent to which workplace environmental factors relatively predisposed stress management among academic staff of federal universities in South-West, Nigeria, this study concludes that, workplace environmental factors positively predicted stress management among academic staff of federal universities in south-west, Nigeria.

Recommendation

Based on the results of the findings, it is therefore recommended that if the stress management level among academic staff should be at optimal rate, the job specification of each academic staff should be well spelled out and such person should be saddled with workload that matches his or her skill. That will greatly reduce ambiguity/ role conflict among the academic staff as well reduces stress associated with work allocations. The study emphasised the necessity for integration of leisure counselors into the educational system to enrich lecturers' leisure time activities and contribute to more productive, healthy and stress free life.

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