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EDITORIAL

Our regularity, wide circulation through AJOL and emphasis on current topical issue that are directly related to social and organizational lives of people of African decent have made this journal of interest to many people across the globe. There has been a great increase in subscription and consultation of the journal over the years, and because of this, this particular edition has come out earlier than its schedule period. We are in the process of clearing a backlog of articles submitted for publication in our Journal and may therefore maintain this trend.

In the journal you are presently holding, you would come across articles on neglected children, women issues, sexual behaviour and crime related matters and politics. It is a must read for everyone.

We seize the opportunity to say thank you once more for sustaining the interest just when we thought it was about time we suspend its publication due to financial constraints.

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SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS IN THE PSYCHO-SOCIAL MANAGEMENT OF STRESS AMONG INDUSTRIAL WORKERS

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ABSTRACT

The paper described the nature of stress and how it affects workers' health and job performance in industrial organizations. The paper pointed out that, stress can cause physical and mental illness in the workers and these can affect their performance at work negatively. It also discussed how social work interventions are helpful in the psycho-social management of stress among industrial workers. it is suggested in this paper that, the employers of labour should help in meeting the needs of workers adequately and should ensure that good interpersonal relationship exist between them and their employees to help them experience reduced symptoms of stress and anxiety that can cripple them at work.

Keywords: Social Work Intervention, Psycho-Social Management, Stress, Industrial Workers.

INTRODUCTION

The internal equilibrium of an individual is maintained when there is a balance between the internal environment and external environment. However, when an object or any event (stressor) threatens human life, or tries to throw the organism out of the balance, a state of disequilibrium ensues. Therefore, stress is an adaptive response to a situation that is perceived as challenging or threatening to the person's well-being (DeFrank and Ivancevich 1998). The implication is that stress is the person's reaction to a situation and not the situation itself.

According to Zastrow (2001), stress is the physiological and emotional reactions to stressors. A stressor is a demand, situation, or circumstance that disrupts a person's equilibrium (internal balanced and initiates the stress response). An individual under such a situation becomes tensed, and apprehensive.

Stress is a threat or anticipation of future harm, either physical or psychological events that lower individual's self esteem. According to Selye (1976), Stress is a state within the organism, which manifests itself by general adaptation syndrome. It is a non-specific response of the body to the demand made upon it. Hence, it suggests excessive demands that produce disturbance of physiological, social, and psychological systems.

Identified this way, stress can have both positive and negative valences (Scully, 1980). In the positive direction, it can be a powerful motivator for a change. Thus, both psychological and physiological responses to stress prepare one for the action called "fight and fight responses". Though, neither flight nor fight may be a possible coping alternative in clinical setting, that energy, if constructively channelled, can produce creative approach to change and self-development. On the other hand, when energy inherent in stress is not channelled outward, stress takes a negative valence. This is mis-direction of energy which makes the body to turn on itself, causing serious emotional and physical disturbances.

> *Stress can be anything that threatens to damage the organism. It can be a disease, trauma, germ, air or noise pollution, even, it can accompany any situation that produces anxiety, frustration, and conflict. Though, stress is generally addressed in terms of individuals, it can also be identified in a group (e.g. group of workers). Such stress is often considered job-related or occupational stress. Stress as a source of tension; frustration and dissatisfaction lead to difficulties in communication, interpersonal relationships, morale and effectiveness at work and health (Institute of Management, 1993).*

Work is a significant and meaningful feature of life with the majority of us spending around 25% of our adult lives working. While work can provide us with structure, purpose, satisfaction, self-esteem and spending power, the workplace can also be a setting of stress and worry. In the UK in 2004, work-related stress was responsible for six million days of sick leave a year (BUPA's Health Information Team, 2004). Employees frequent experience of stress at work hurt their job performance and increase their risk of mental and physical health problems, hence the need to see stress as a workplace problem.

WHY IS STRESS A WORKPLACE PROBLEM

Job stress affects workers at some point, and sometimes become overpowering. The sources of job stress include physical characteristics of work, such as heat, noise, and cold. Other stressors include time pressure, job changes such as layoffs, demotions, or promotions, exercise responsibility; ambiguity in role demands, and

even chronic boredom. The consequences of job stress include anxiety, depression, drug and alcohol abuse, suicide and antisocial behaviour (Hodson and Sullivan, 1995).

Work-related stress is becoming an epidemic in almost every organization. A survey in America confirmed that over half of American employees say that they work under a great deal of stress (Galinsky, Kim and Bond, 2001). Therefore, stress at work causes physical, mental and financial consequences for employers as well as employees. Stress at workplace affects the performance of an organization to the detriment of its staff. The most detrimental effects of stress include high level of absenteeism, poor job performance, low morale, low commitment, increased incidence of accidents, difficult industrial relations, poor relationships with customers and possible litigation (Spiers, 2004).

Financially, stressed employees take more sick days and file more disability claims than do contented employees. Disgruntled employees often quit after extensive investment has been made in their training, and another person has to be trained in their place. Furthermore, errors made by stressed workers can result in faulty products that cannot be sold, or worse, that fail after sale and lead to law suits.

Emotionally, stressed workers may become depressed or angry, alcoholic or drug users which in turn creates more problem. In term of safety at work, people who are over stressed are less attentive and can accidentally damage equipment or injure themselves or others. At the extreme, stress can lead to violence, and management or co-workers can be hurt or killed (Jaffe, Dumke, Hutman and Segal 2006).

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) report as sited by Helpguide (2006) states that job stress results from both the characteristics of a worker and the working conditions. According to one school of thought, differences in personality and coping style of the worker are most important in predicting job stress, while another school of thought suggests that certain working conditions are stressful to most people. These conditions include the design of tasks, management style, interpersonal relationships, work roles, career concerns and environmental conditions.

Spiers (2004) highlighted the following major stress factors at workplace, they are inadequate or poor communication, the feed off and reinforcement of both home and work-based stresses, lack of correlation between the work demands made on an individual, his or her ability, and the amount of control over working practices that are available to them, management style in terms of consultation, support and control and in correct work-life balance in terms of good health and efficient performance.

The social environment is another source of stress affecting individual workers (Parkes, 1982). This does not only cause or aggravate illness; it helps in defining the concept of ill-health or the terms in which it is perceived. How one responds to stress, therefore, is dependent on one's perception of the availability of supportiveness of his environment.

When the environment (workplace) is perceived to be conductive, there is less stress and performance is greatly enhanced. Thus, the presence of an intimate relationship in term of availability of confident to whom the individual will reciprocally relate, serve as a buffer against gradual loss in the role interaction (Scully, 1980).

Other sources of stress among industrial workers include: excessive job demand (Scully, 1980); job dissatisfaction, poor working conditions, poor pay, lack of staff, lack of promotion, (Gray-Toft, et al, 1998 and Parkes, 1982); and role conflict and ambiguity (Drory, 1981). Whatever be the source of stress for the workers, there are certain responses that indicate its presence in them. According to Scully (1980), the individual may experience physiological indicators like muscular tension, headache, loss of appetite (anorexia), uncontrolled eating, urinary frequency, insomnia, lethargy, body aches or pains, chest pain, palpitation, high blood pressure, body tremor, increased perspiration, etc.

Psychologically, the individuals may feel dis-oriented, dis-organized, angry, anxious, frustrated, dejected, depressed, apathetic, helpless, afraid, irritable, or withdrawn. They may also experience physical disorders such as peptic ulcer, colitis, myocardial infraction, asthma and coronary diseases (Glass, 1977; Mojoyinola, 1984). All these symptoms or indicators of stress may have adverse effects on workers' health and their job performance.

McShare and Glinow (2003) classified causes of work-related stressors into four: physical environment, role-related, interpersonal and organizational stressors. Physical environment stressors include excessive noise, poor lighting, safety hazards, lack of privacy, clerical employees experience significantly higher stress levels in noisy open offices than in quiet areas (Evans and Johnson, 2000; Mclamed and Bruhis, 1996).

Role-related stressors occur where employees have difficult understanding, reconciling, or performing the various roles in their lives. Four role-related stressors studied by researchers are role-conflict (Siegall and Cummings, 1995; Kelloway and Barling, 1991; Stoneman and Holliday, 2001); role-ambiguity Saks and Ashforth, 1996; Nelson and Sutton, 1990); workload, task control (Lubinger, 2001).

Interpersonal stressors include ineffective supervision, office politics and other conflicts experienced with people such as sexual harassment (Munson, Hulin and

Drasgow, 2000; Piotrkowski, 1998; French, 2001); workplace violence (Neuman and Baron, 1998; Reiss-Koncar, 2001; Barling, 1996).

This paper therefore, looks at how stress affects the health and performance of industrial workers and the subsequent roles which the social workers have to play in the psycho-social management of stress among the industrial workers.

EFFECTS OF STRESS ON WORKERS' HEALTH AND JOB PERFORMANCE

The workplace stress have its impact on physiological, emotional and/or behavioural responses of the employees. The physiological changes can be in any of the following symptoms, increased cold and other illness (Cohen, Turrell and Smith, 1991), blood pressure (Dabro, 2001), tiredness, stomach ulcers, digestive disorders such as indigestion, constipation or diarrhoea, weight loss or gain and headaches. Emotional impact are increased tension, anxiety, moodiness, depression (Kessler, 1997; Weiss and Cropanzano, 1996), frustration and feeling of emptiness. The behavioural changes of workers are seen in over/under eating, misuse of alcohol and other drugs, interpersonal difficulties, difficulty in sleeping, aggressive or passive behaviour, workplace conflict and absenteeism (NT Worksafe, 2003).

Furthermore, studies have shown that stress had significant effects on workers' health and job performance (Parkes, 1982 and Mojoyinola, 2007). NIOSH reports that evidence suggests workplace stress plays an important role in several types of chronic health problems, especially cardiovascular disease (Everson, et al, 2001; Bosma, Peter, Siegrist and Marmot (1998), musculoskeletal conditions and psychological disorders (Helpguide, 2006). The economic impact of these is not only on the employees but also on the businesses that employ them.

The effects of occupational stress on workers' health and job performance were well demonstrated in the studies carried out by Mojoyinola in 1984 and 2007. He discovered that student nurses working in different wards at the University College Hospital (UCH) Ibadan, and qualified nurses working in selected public Hospitals in Ibadan Metropolis in Nigeria, experienced high level of stress because of the excessive job demands made upon them, poor pay, lack of staff, lack of equipment and the unco-operative attitude of other members of the medical team, among others. He found out that there was a high staff turnover and negative attitude of the nurses towards their jobs. He further observed that some of these nurses complain of constant headaches, back pains, body pains, lack of concentration, insomnia, peptic ulcer, indigestion, etc. which indicated physical and mental dys-functioning arising from stress.

Lester et al, (1980) in their studies among nurses working in pediatric intensive care unit found that the nurse experienced high level of stress because they are dissatisfied with their pay, supervisors and job. As a result of this, the nurses' experienced

common symptoms of stress, such as fatigue, over eating, worrisome thought, irritability and angry feelings with minimal effect on their health and job performance. Similarly, Elliot (1994), in her study among some groups of women found that stress caused coronary heart disease in them. Such diseases include ischeamia, myocardial infarction, hypertension, elevated cardiac output, etc. Thus, it is possible for industrial workers to have similar experiences when they become stressed, and these may affect their job performance negatively.

Working in a stressful situation therefore may make industrial workers experience increased symptoms of stress and anxiety. They may become depressed, dejected, sad, withdrawn, isolated, angry, hostile and aggressive (DeFrank and Ivancevish, 1998; Newman and Baron, 1998; Greenberg and Barling, 1999). When these happen, their physical and mental health may be greatly disturbed, and their performance at work become reduced. The goals of the organization in this kind of situation will also become unattainable.

A worker's ability to cope with increasing workplace stress is affected by the amount of stress they are subjected to from stressors outside the workplace. The coping mechanism of workers will also depend on the extent to which they fell threatened by the stressor, the action they knew they can take to reduce the impact of the stressor and their expectations as to how they will be ask to cope with the stressor. To this end, social workers have useful roles to play.

SOCIAL WORK INTERVENTIONS AND STRESS MANAGEMENT

The importance of stress management in treating physical and emotional disorders has altered the traditional physician-patient relationship since stress-related disorders are number-one health problem (Romas and Sharma, 1995). Effective stress management enables people to live fulfilling, healthy, satisfying, and productive lives (Tubesing, 1981).

The National Council on Compensation Insurance estimated that stress-related medical and disability payments cost US companies $26 billion a year plus an additional $95 billion a year in lost productivity (Norman, 2002). It is therefore, necessary for organizations to have interest in a variety of stress-reduction programmes. This paper now looks at social workers interventions in the psycho-social management of job-related stress with the intent of coping with job related stress.

A) *Raising the level of optimism of workers during stressful situations:* Over the years, a great deal of research and theory had focused on the ways people deal with difficulties they encounter in their day-to-day lives. For instance, Seligman and Schulman (1988) confirm that optimists are much less likely than pessimists to report physical illness and symptoms during highly

stressful periods. Scheier and Carver (1985; 1986) have suggested that dispositional optimism may have implications for the manner in which people deal with the stress of life. Thus, if workers experiencing stressful situations could have the expectation that they will eventually overcome their emotional problems or that their grievances will be positively resolved, they would experience reduced symptoms of stress or anxiety at work. Optimism is one way of coping with stress of life. Therefore, when workers become frustrated as a result of their unmet needs, the social workers have to encourage them to have the hope that their needs will be met at the appropriate time. They also have to encourage them to exercise enough patience in their struggle for their rights and help to initiate useful talks with their employer.

B) *Removing the source of stress or Reducing the emotional distress associated with stressful situation:* To reduce stress in industrial workers there is need to remove the source of stress or reducing the emotional distress associated with the stressful situations. This is an important social work intervention Lazarus et al (1981); Folkman et al (1980); Lazarus et al (1978); and Mechanic (1962); have described two general ways in which people cope with stressful situations. These include, problem-focused coping, and emotion – focused coping. The problem – focused coping has the goal of removing or, circumventing the source of stress while the emotion – focused coping is the attempt to reduce the emotional distress associated with the stressful situation.

Though, problem – focused coping and emotion – focused coping can occur together in the same coping contest. Problem – focused coping is generally more likely in situation where people believe that something positive or constrictive can be done about the stressor (e.g. removing excess work load). Emotion-focused coping on the other hand, is more likely when people believe that the situation must be endured (McCrae, 1984). It should be noted that coping, whether problems-focused or emotion-focused helps in ameliorating stress. However, attempts to cope with difficult situations are not always successful because when people find that they cannot remove or reduce the threat, they may give up their efforts to attain goals that are impeded by the Stressors (Scheier and Carver, 1985).

Therefore, to help industrial workers cope successfully with stress in their jobs, social workers must understand the stressful situations and determine when problem-focused coping strategies or emotion-focused coping strategies could be used. For instance, the social workers should be able to know that problem-focused coping is more likely in situation that seem amenable to positive change and among people who expect to see positive change. Hence, they should be able to understand the characteristics of workers, who will

actively attempt to deal with stressors in a problem-focused way. To this end, they should understand that such workers will like to engage in positive re-interpretation of stressful situations, and seek social support from other people.

Therefore, social workers have to guide or counsel the workers to make useful plan of actions for resolving their grievances or removing the tensions engender by their actions. They should also assist this group of workers to make light of the stressful situation, refuse to get serious about it, find new faith or some important truth about life and suppress competing activities to reduce their stress.

Similarly, social workers have to understand the needs of other workers (pessimists) who may engage in emotion-focused coping strategies like denial, self-blames, withdrawal or disengaging from efforts. Social workers have to help these workers to overcome their stress by emphasizing the positive aspect of the situation. Thus, encouraging them to consider less the pains associated with their present conditions, but enduring the situations till when they will be able to have their needs met.

It is hoped that when the social workers assist the industrial workers to cope successfully with the various stressful situations in their work in these ways they will be able to perform well on their job, thereby increasing the level of the productivity in their organization.

C)   ***Resolving Industrial Conflicts to reduce stress in workers:*** Conflicts in industrial settings may arise from the failure of employers of labour to meet the needs of workers (e.g. demand for improved working conditions, better pay, regular promotion, etc).

In order to avoid frequent strikes by workers in industrial organizations, social workers have to embark on social work intervention of taking up the grievances or demands of the workers and enter into discussion with the management of the organization. He/she will have to make both parties (labour and management) embrace content of relationship management of peace education in order to promote harmonious industrial climate for the attainments of set objectives (Ajala, 2007).

D)   ***Promoting and Enhancing Physical and Mental Health of Workers:*** Reducing stress among workers implies enhancing their physical and mental health. Therefore, social work intervention in which social workers work directly with the employers and members of their family will help them overcome their problems (Skidmore et al, 1997).

Hence, it behoves social workers to help industrial workers on problems like alcoholism, drug abuse, anxiety, depression, inferiority feelings, mental and family difficulties including child or spouse abuse. Through case work, group work and community organization approaches, social workers should help individual or group of workers to be more effective or efficient in their works.

To achieve this end, social workers have to conduct series of interviews and organize group discussion forum with a view to helping the workers gain insight into their problems, understand their problems, face them or work through them during group interaction. The counselling process will help the employee understand the stressors, acquire stress management skills and practice those skills (Klink et al, 2001; Rotarius, Liberman and Liberman, 2000). The social worker also have to help the workers overcome their stress or emotional problems by referring them to specific agencies in the community (e.g. Psychiatric Hospitals, Psychology or Counselling Clinics) that can assist in solving individual or family problems.

E)   *Soliciting and Advocating for Workers' Welfare:* Workers become unhappy and discontented with their jobs because their working conditions, pay, supervision and cooperation from co-workers are poor (Mojoyinola, 1984). Therefore, social work interventions of soliciting and advocating for improvement in the working conditions and welfare of workers are helpful in reducing stress of workers.

To this end, the social workers have to help the industrial workers by appealing to their employers to make adequate provision for their needs. That is, they have to make sure that workers are given better pay, allowances, free medical treatment, educational opportunities etc. All these measures will help in reducing stress or tension among the workers.

(F) *Relaxation Training and Physical Exercises:* Research indicates that physical exercise reduces the physiological consequences of stress by helping employees lower their respiration, muscle tension, heart-beat, and stomach acidity (Daley and Parfitt, 1996; Falkenberg, 1987). Relaxation training is an intervention in its own right to assist people (workers) to reduce anxiety and to keep emotions within manageable limits (Hepworth and Larsen (1993). Two major physiological components of excessive tension and anger at work are rapid breathing and tightening of the muscles.

Relaxation training targets both of these components, through deep breathing and muscle relaxation (Sethi, 1984; Matteson and Ivancevich, 1982; Zastrow, 1993). It is imperative therefore that social workers working in the industrial

organizations should teach the stressed workers how to feel relaxed whenever they feel highly tensed up at work.

This may involve teaching them how to engage in deep breathing exercise and relax different muscles of the body.

CONCLUSION

The therapeutic value of learning to manage stress is of greater importance to both labour and management. An individual experiencing stress at work will necessarily engage in one form of withdrawal behaviour or the other. Though, this behaviour is adaptive, it is not curative and the individual engages in behaviour which is dysfunctional both inside and outside the work place. This will not be profitable to the achievement of organizational goals. Stress, could also lead to a sense of frustration and loss of individuality and this may have repercussion in the stability of the family and the society. An organization (industrial organization) does not benefit too since withdrawal behaviour engaged in by workers may affect its smooth operation by having pack of uncommitted workers. Thus, an organization contending with this situation cannot realize much of its objectives as it should.

The presence of stress among Industrial Workers, emanating from unresolved conflicts could make them engage in displaced or hostile aggression towards their employer and other people alike. To ensure that there is peace and harmony in industries or to see that industrial workers experience reduced symptoms of stress, management of various organizations should see that good interpersonal relationship exist between the employers and the employees.

It is also suggested that the employers of labour should encourage and embark upon a more employee – participative programmes along their decision line since stress can result from low participation. Great participation in the organization decision process will in no doubt enhance individual's self-esteem and feeling of control, thereby reducing job dissatisfaction and stress among industrial workers. The workers should also be given adequate remuneration, compensations, and opportunities to advance themselves. The above suggestions are in no way very exhaustive, by they could be applied by any organization in managing job stress.

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