

Social and Institutional Supports Influence on Stress Management among Academic Staff in Federal Universities in South-West Nigeria

Agbomehre M. MOMOH, Ph.D

Department of Adult Education
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria
agboosho@yahoo.com

Donatus UKPABI, Ph.D

Department of Adult Education
University of Ibadan, Ibadan, Nigeria

Abstract

This study examined the combined influence of social (career advice, connectedness and feedbacks appraisals) and institutional (research assistance, promotion, collegiality, protection, friendship and opportunity) supports on the management of stress among academic staff in four selected federal universities in South-West, Nigeria. This study adopted the descriptive survey design. The universities were stratified into existing faculties. The proportional sampling technique was used to select 1000 academic staff. Two hypotheses were tested at 0.05 level of significance. Data were analysed using Pearson product moment correlation and content analysis.

Effective social support system coupled with opportunities for promotion and research assistance as well as promotion positively determined the management of stress among academic staff in four (4) 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, Social and institutional supports.

Introduction

A number of research findings have documented that, prolonged stress has negative effects on individual health as well as employees' attitudes towards the organisation (Kester, Oni & Ogidan, 2010). Researchers have estimated that several millions of working days are lost to stress-related problems (American Psychological Association, 2004). According to Khatibi, 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.

The teachers in secondary schools in Nigeria and in other countries, as well as lecturers may be considered to be working in stressful environments. Generally, the work of a lecturer comprises teaching, conducting research, civil obligation and administration. They are expected to attend seminars, conferences and conduct researches in their fields of specialisation and publish the outcomes of their researches as well as write references for their students. They may also participate in community life by serving on government's special panels, give public lectures or serve as consultants to the public. For most academic staff, working under continuously stressful conditions 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 staff 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 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.

Available records reveal that, Nigerian universities are hard hit as evidenced 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, heart 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 reduce stress among academic staff to avoid a mismatch between the demands and pressure of work on them on one hand, as well as performing their duties as academic staff. 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.

Hypotheses

- Ho₁: There is no significant relationship between the components of social support and stress management.
- Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between each of the institutional support and stress management among academic staff.

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 and administrative responsibilities and the productivity of these staff determines to large extent the quantity of productivity in the Universities

The academic staff strength of University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (UNILAG), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAB) were used for the study.

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, Nigeria. The sample size was first determined from Academic staff strength using RaoSoft online sample size calculator (Raosoft Inc, 2004).

The instruments for the study was Social Support Scale (SSS) which contains 16 items on the social support among academic staff. Informational social support was adapted from Schrodts, et al., (2003) Academic Socialization scale. This scale have dimensions of ownership ($\alpha = .87$) and "adequate information ($\alpha = .83$) and connectedness ($\alpha = .84$). The respondents were asked to rate their opinions according to four points rating of likert scale from 1 to 4 signifying, 1 (Not at all), 2 (When occasion demands), 3 (Some of the time) and 4 (Frequently) for all the 16 questions. A Cronbach's alpha of .88 was obtained for this measure. Face validity and concurrent validity was established. The instrument was established through a pilot study with a test retest reliability of 0.79. A typical item on the scale reads: "my senior colleagues and co-lecturers help me to be more visible within the communication discipline. The sub scales include career advice - $\alpha=0.65$, connectedness - $\alpha=0.72$ and provision of feedbacks - $\alpha=0.59$.

The institutional support scale (ISS), contains 17 items on the social support among academic staff. This scale items were adapted from Schrodts, Cawyer, and Sanders (2003). Academic Mentoring Behaviours. Faculty perceptions of behaviours associated with their mentoring relationships were assessed using 17 items taken from Ragins and McFarlin's (1990) Mentor Role Instrument (MRI). The dimension include research assistance ($\alpha = .82$), protection ($\alpha = .79$) collegiality ($\alpha = .78$), promotion ($\alpha = .65$) friendship ($\alpha = .70$), and some items from the connectedness ($\alpha = .84$) sub dimension of Schrodts, et al., (2003) Academic Socialization scale. The respondents were asked to rate their opinions according to four points rating of likert scale from 1 to 4 signifying 1 (Not at all), 2 (When occasion demands), 3 (Some of the time) and 4 (Frequently) for all the 16 questions. A Cronbach's alpha of .88 was obtained for this measure. Face validity and concurrent validity was established. The instrument was obtained through a pilot study with a test retest reliability of 0.76. A typical item on the scale reads: "my senior colleagues and co-lecturers help me to be more visible within the communication discipline. Social Support (research assistance - $\alpha=0.84$, promotion - $\alpha=0.63$, collegiality - $\alpha=0.69$, protection - $\alpha=0.81$, friendship - $\alpha=0.77$ and opportunity- $\alpha=0.68$) scales

Data collected were presented and analysed using frequency counts, percentages, means, Pearson product moment correlation and multiple regressions analysis.

Result of Findings

Hypothesis One

H_{01} : There is no significant relationship between the components of social support and stress management.

To determine the relationship between social support factors and stress management among academic staff in federal universities, the Pearson correlation analysis was used and the result presented in Table 1a.

Table 1a: Pearson Correlation on the Relationship between Social Support and Stress Management among Academic Staff in Federal Universities In South -West Nigeria

	Mean	S.D	Pearson r	Sig.	Remark
Stress Management	119.74	15.95			
Advice	8.60	2.21	.18**	<.05	Significant
Feedback Appraisal	11.35	2.81	.10**	<.05	Significant
Connectedness	12.12	2.55	.18**	<.05	Significant

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

Interpretation and Discussion

The results on relationship between social support factors and work stress management among academic staff in federal universities in South-West Nigeria obtained from the analysis as shown in Table 1a. It reveal that, there is significant positive relationship between advice ($r=.18, p<.05$), feedback appraisal ($r=.10, p<.05$) and connectedness ($r=.18, p<.05$) and work stress management among academic staff. The result implies that, increase in good advice, connectedness and feedback appraisals from colleagues and senior colleagues related significantly to sound stress management and reduction in work stress. Based on the above result, the null hypothesis which states that, there will be no significant relationship between each of the social supports factors and stress management among academic staff the hypothesis was rejected and the alternative hypothesis accepted. The result connotes that, giving support in terms of advice, feedback and making them feel connected among others, should help in alleviating the stress level of the lecturers in Federal Universities. The findings support several studies which have underscored the moderation effect of social support on stress coping and management. Specifically, the results support Lakey, Orehek, Hain, and VanVleet (2010) who stated that received support was related to positive affect and psychological wellbeing. The findings also give credence to Gleason, Iida, Shřout, and Bolger (2008) who found that, social support events have both positive effects on life outcomes. The viewpoint was buttressed in the interview with a Senior Lecturer from one of the selected Universities, he said:

The issue of social support is two ways. It is not the same with colleagues who have PhD and those still struggling to bag their PhD. The relationship between professors and their juniors if they are their anointed mentees either through belonging to the same religious group or ethnic extraction. However, if they are not among "the boys" of the professor you may not get the desire help you need. For example, a Senior Lecturer or Professor ought to teach a doctoral student under his or her supervision the soft skills that promote effective teaching and research, breakdown the psychological wall between both of them, and assist the candidate with materials relevant to the research topic. In other words, senior academics should go the extra mile to inculcate in their junior colleagues the necessary intellectual, moral, and emotional attributes, which are indispensable for productive academic work. The importance of proper mentoring in keeping Universities alive and vibrant as centers of learning at the highest level particularly for the next generation of scholars cannot be over emphasized.

Apart from encouraging neophytes and future lecturers to have the skills and knowledge for best practices in our Universities, mentoring creates a strong web of interpersonal relationships connecting different families together, thereby creating communities that transcend the narrow confines of University campuses. Those mentored today would be mentors to others tomorrow. In this way, the lofty academic culture that makes Universities ivory towers is sustained. However, in a large number of cases, what exists is a caricature of what genuine mentoring ought to be. Some senior academics turn their PhD students into glorified domestic servants who run all kinds of inconsequential errands to please them. Several Professors use their postgraduate students to execute lucrative projects in town, and pay them pittance for their efforts. Sometimes, what goes on in the name of mentoring or supervisor-student relationship is exploitation, including academic exploitation, in which a supervisor asks his student to write a paper and publishes it as if he was the author without the slightest acknowledgement of the person who actually did the work

Respondents who favoured the establishment of formal mentoring programmes argued that it would advance a tradition of mentoring and foster commitment to its ideals in the faculty:

The growth of the university meant that it now had more population. Also, most lecturers did not know each other nor do the students. Some senior lecturers still behaved as if they were in an average populated university; as such they keep core knowledge and responsibilities to themselves rather than sharing it with others. Some situations needed to

- *be monitored closely particularly newer lecturers, and should be supported with coping strategies to deal with them.*

Further analysis carried out ascertains the pattern of the results of relationship between social support factors and work stress management across the four selected universities FUNAB, Abeokuta; Obafemi Awolowo University, Ife; University of Ibadan, Ibadan and University of Lagos, Lagos. The analysis was carried out using Pearson correlation analysis.

Table 1.b: Pearson correlation on relationship between social support and stress among academic staff in Federal Universities in South –West ,Nigeria

Variables	FUNNAB		OAU		UI		UNLAG	
Advice	.160*	<.05	.222**	<.05	.298**	<.05	.311**	<.05
Feedback appraisal	.200**	<.05	.232**	<.05	.172**	<.05	.134*	<.05
Connectedness	-0.08	>.05	.310**	<.05	.227**	<.05	.232**	<.05

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

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

The results obtained shown in the Table 1.b, the results from FUNAB, Abeokuta shows significant positive relationship between advice ($r = .16, p < .05$), feedback appraisal ($r = .20, p < .05$) and work stress management among the academic staff. This implies that, increase in advice and feedback appraisals related significantly to decrease in work stress. However, there is no significant relationship between connectedness and work stress management among academic staff ($r = -0.08, p > .05$).

For the result of the academics from the University of Ife, there is significant positive relationship between advice ($r = .22, p < .05$), feedback appraisal ($r = .23, p < .05$), connectedness ($r = .31, p < .05$) and work stress management among academic staff. In Ibadan, there is significant positive relationship between advice ($r = .30, p < .05$), feedback appraisal ($r = .17, p < .05$), connectedness ($r = .23, p < .05$), and work stress management among academic staff. Also, the results for Lagos, reveal significant positive relationship between advice ($r = .31, p < .05$), feedback appraisal ($r = .13, p < .05$), connectedness ($r = .23, p < .05$) and work stress management among academic staff. It suggests therefore that, giving the necessary advice, feedback, and connectedness, academics will cope well despite the level of job stress across universities sampled in the study.

The result however, indicated that, connectedness did not relate to stress coping management in the University of Abeokuta which may have resulted from the non-residential status of the university. As such, extended informal relationship may not be well-pronounced like that of other universities in the study in which staff are residing.

The finding supports Schaufeli, Bakker and Rhenen (2009) that autonomy, social support, performance, feedback and opportunities to learn are inherent motivational qualities job resources associated with job stress. Availability of job resources, play a motivational role because they foster employees' growth, learning and development or because they are instrumental in achieving work goals. Job resources fulfill basic human needs, such as the needs for autonomy, relatedness, and competence as postulated in self-determination theory (Ryan & Frederick, 1997; Deci & Ryan, 2000). They authors further argued that , proper feedback fosters learning, thereby increasing job competence; whereas decision latitude and social support satisfy the needs for autonomy and the need to belong, respectively. These resources, in their turn, function as reserves that can be drawn on later to help people thrive, thus triggering a gain cycle towards greater emotional wellbeing and more resources such that positive emotions predict future improvements in social support from supervisors and coworkers, future improvements in supervisor evaluations and future pay increases. Hence, individuals who at initial assessment experience positive emotions had, over time, transformed themselves into more effective and socially integrated employees who could draw upon larger resource pools (that is ., social support, money) (Staw, Sutton, & Pellod, 1994; Wright & Straw, 1999).

Archibong, Ogbiji, and Anijaobi-Idem, (2010) contend that the relationship among faculty members is very poor and the outlook negative especially for junior lecturers in terms of social support, connectedness or feedback. Many academic staff feels unwanted, because the older staff are not friendly and there is obvious discrimination between senior and junior staff. No doubt, every employee would desire to establish relationships, failure of which may expose them to unnecessary anxiety, frustration and disappointments. The exposure in question could affect their personal and professional adjustment.

Knight and Trowler (1999) found that the new academics were often worried and feeling isolated and uncertain about what they should be doing. Some of their respondents felt work environments were friendly but not as congenial as they might have wished. Academics not receiving feedback are bound to feel isolated when there are no guides to make the system less traumatic. They need seniors to assist them, interact with them, go to lectures with them especially at the early stages of their tenure and explain things to them to make adjustment easier for them. Induction training and mentoring can be effective agents of professional socialisation as these could have made the transition into academic life much easier. Discrimination is often visible because the older staff is usually attended to first whether in the allocation of courses or allocation of facilities. Before the new staff (Anijaobi-Idem and Archibong, 2012).

The other angle to feedback is that people may be resistant to change, have illogical perceptions of workload and the importance of getting assistance from others. Senior faculty staff needs to understand the long-term benefits of university progress and take more responsibility for improving outcomes and confronting problems. They should reduce the

tendency to undermine the good work of others through negatively sitting back and complaining: "what kind of idea is this?" a discussant from University of Lagos opines:

A weakened University administration is further weakened by the activities of academic, administrative, technical, and junior staff unions whose wings have grown beyond curtailment in the last few years. According to one vice-chancellor, union leaders feel that they should be consulted on virtually every matter within the University, including admissions, appointments, and promotions. But the most damage has been to basic University missions, particularly teaching and research. Not only are teachers in short supply across the nation's Universities, the resources available for teaching are grossly inadequate. Libraries, laboratories, computer centers and other teaching facilities are substandard.

However, even if necessary resources were available, many University teachers were ill-prepared, being products of the same substandard Universities. Even professors originally well trained have become unproductive as they seek government patronage or lucrative consultancies. Many professors are indolent and derelict of their duties: They are not publishing as they should. They are often absent from classes. They avoid administrative duties. They fail to provide mentorship to junior lecturers. They are very good at patronage and the politicisation of appointments and promotions.

Hypothesis two

Ho₂: There is no significant relationship between each of the institutional support and stress management among academic staff.

This section examines the relationship between institutional support factors and work stress management among academic staff in federal universities as stated in hypothesis 2, also, the Pearson correlation analysis was used and the result presented in Table 2a.

Table 2a: Pearson Correlation on the relationship between Institutional Support factors and Work stress management among academic staff in Federal Universities in South – West, Nigeria

	Mean	S.D	Pearson r	Sig.	Remark
Stress Management	119.74	15.95			
Research Assistance	11.34	2.85	.10**	<.05	Significant
Protection	10.18	2.30	-.02	>.05	N.S
Friendship	5.90	1.42	.03	>.05	N.S
Opportunity	11.34	2.60	.17**	<.05	Significant
Collegiality	5.90	1.42	.03	>.05	N.S
Promotion	8.07	2.23	.14**	<.05	Significant

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

Interpretation and Discussion

The results of the analysis overall displayed in Table 2, reveal that there is significant positive relationship between research assistance ($r=.10$, $p<.05$), opportunity ($r=.17$, $p<.05$), and promotion ($r=.14$, $p<.05$) and work stress management among academic staff of the selected federal universities. The result indicates that increase in research assistance, opportunity and promotion significantly relate to effective work stress management among academic staff from the selected federal universities. Also, the result highlights the relationship between protection, friendship, and collegiality. For Ife, there is significant positive relationship between research assistance ($r=.20$, $p<.05$), promotion ($r=.17$, $p<.05$) and work stress management. Indicating that increase in research assistance and promotion significantly relate with increase in work stress management. This implies that stress management given adequate institutional support will significantly reduce stress. The hypothesis is accepted.

According to the buffering hypothesis, individuals who have high institutional support are able to rely on others in dealing with stressful situations. As a result, they are less adversely affected by stress and burnout. It has been found that institutional support can buffer the negative effects of stress (Wong & Cheuk, 2005). This supports studies which have identified that social support during job stress played a central role in predicting dimensions of burnout among the lecturers. This finding is consistent with previous researchers who reported similar results (Ganster & Schanbroek, 1991; Kokkinos, 2007; Moore, 2001).

The least mentioned means is encouraging members to request to be mentored or protégé (25%). Okurame (2008) reports multiple areas in which they have supported their protégés. His content analysis identifies five recurring areas of support. These are introducing protégés to group and international research networks (88.8%); joint authorship of articles, critique of manuscripts proposed for publication by protégés, and provision of information on

journal outlets (88.8%); counselling and advice (33.3%); technical training in analysis of data (22.2%), and financial support (22.2%).

The result was further broken down to ascertain the pattern of the relationship between instrumental support and Work stress management among lecturers in the universities of FUNNAB, Abeokuta; ObafemiAwolowo University, Ife; University of Ibadan, Ibadan and University of Lagos, Lagos. The analysis was carried out using Pearson correlation analysis this shown in the Table 2.b:

Table 2.b: Pearson correlation on relationship between institutional support and Work stress management among academic staff in federal universities

Variables	FUNNAB	OAU	UI	UNILAG
Research assistance	.141*	<.05	.204** <.05	.382** <.05
Protection	.188**	<.05	0.05 >.05	0.09 >.05
Friendship	.158*	<.05	0.03 >.05	.369** <.05
Opportunity	-0.07	>.05	0.09 >.05	.357** <.05
Collegiality	-.158*	<.05	0.03 >.05	.369** <.05
Promotion	-0.04	>.05	.170** <.05	.182** <.05

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

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

The table shows that for Abeokuta, there is significant positive relationship between research assistance ($r=.14, p<.05$), protection ($r=.19, p<.05$), friendship ($r=.16, p<.05$), collegiality ($r=.16, p<.05$) and work stress management. The result indicates that increase in research assistance, protection, friendship and collegiality related significantly with decrease in work stress management. For Ife, there is significant positive relationship between research assistance ($r=.20, p<.05$), promotion ($r=.17, p<.05$) and work stress management. Indicating that increase in research assistance and promotion related significantly with increase in work stress management. For Ibadan, there is significant positive relationship between research assistance ($r=.38, p<.05$), friendship ($r=.37, p<.05$), opportunity ($r=.36, p<.05$), collegiality ($r=.37, p<.05$), promotion ($r=.18, p<.05$) and work stress management.

The result implies that research assistance, friendship, opportunity, collegiality and promotion related significantly with increase in work stress management, for Lagos, there is significant inverse relationship between research assistance ($r=-.26, p<.05$), friendship ($r=-.13, p<.05$), collegiality ($r=-.13, p<.05$) and work stress management. This indicates that increase in research assistance, friendship and collegiality significantly relate to decrease in work stress management, while there is significant positive relationship between opportunity ($r=.32, p<.05$), promotion ($r=.17, p<.05$) and work stress management. Implying that increase in opportunity and promotion significantly related to increase in work stress management. The findings support Olorunsole and Arogundade (2012) that provision of motivation, communication and resources availability needed for effective leadership than the State

Universities that was close. The study shows that there is significant difference in the organizational climate of federal and state universities.

The perception of mentoring as a component of academic staff development in Nigeria shows that social support is on the increase. For example Okurame (2008) states that, 37.5% (18 out of 48) of the respondents reported that mentoring is a crucial component that helped them develop as academics. Results show that 10% (3 out of 30) of those who reported a contrary opinion were currently involved in a mentoring relationship. Responses to follow up questions reveal that participants in the study recognised mentoring as an invaluable developmental tool but they differed in their opinion of the type of mentoring relationship to be encouraged. Majority of the respondents (70.8%) disapproved of the establishment of a formal mentoring programme in the faculty; 10.4% were undecided while 18.8% were in favour.

Conclusion and Recommendation

Social and some of the components of institutional supports jointly and relatively predisposed stress management among academic staff in University of Ibadan (UI), University of Lagos (UNILAG), Obafemi Awolowo University (OAU) and Federal University of Agriculture, Abeokuta (FUNAB), Nigeria, this study concludes that, social and institutional supports positively predicted stress management among academic staff of the selected universities in South-West, Nigeria. Strategies to improve work stress management among academic staff in selected universities must take into consideration. It established that advice, feedback appraisal and connectedness all contributed to stress management among the academic staff in the selected Federal universities. Moreover, the importance of research assistance, opportunity and promotion are very vital to reducing stress among academic staff.

Base on the result of findings, the study recommends as follows:

- Lecturers should be carried along when there are changes with the system that will allow for quick and easy adaptation to changes.
- There should be adequate time lag in the areas of examinations, marking of students scripts and collation of results to enhance efficiency and effectiveness.
- Measures such as increment in remuneration, provision of relaxation facilities should be provided and lecturers should be mandated to visit the university counselor from time to time; in order to facilitate productivity and efficiency in their work.
- Building and maintaining a good mid-career development programme so as to avoid stressors like over-promotion, under-promotion, status problem, thwarted ambition and occupational locking-in that always lead to long time work-place stress in library and information profession;

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