

SOURCES OF WORKPLACE STRESSORS AMONG UNIVERSITY LECTURERS IN SOUTH WEST NIGERIA: IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING

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Abstract:

This work investigated the sources of stress among University Lecturers. The population for the study was all academic staff in Nigerian Universities. The 364 subjects who were made up of 223 males and 141 females were drawn from eight (8) Nigerian Universities. One research question and one hypothesis were raised to guide the study. The ex-post-facto research design was employed. A self Report Perceived Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SRPSAQ) constructed by the researcher was used to elicit information from the participant. The instrument had two (2) sections. Section A and B. Section A elicited information on bio-data and section B elicited information on degree of stress inducing factors by choosing “strongly agree” (4) ‘Agree” (3) :Disagree” (2) Strongly “disagree” (1). The face and content validities were ensured while a test-re-test reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained. The data collected were analysed using descriptive statistics (frequency, percentage, mean and standard deviation and inferential statistics (t-test). Result revealed that the level of perceived stress among male and female lecturers was not significantly different. Also, further finding revealed that lecturers experience stress. Sources of most stress include: Poor research incentives (87.35%), poor condition of lecturers offices (81.32%) lack of facilities (78.10%) and students project supervision (77.52%). The findings were discussed and counseling strategies offered.

Key Words: Stress, Lectures, Counselling implication

Introduction

Stress is defined as an organisms total response to environmental demands and pressure. Stress is a necessary and unavoidable concomitant of daily living necessary because without some stress we would be listless and apathetic creatures, and unavoidable because it relates to any external event, be it pleasurable or anxiety producing. A person’s response towards stress depends on whether an event is appraised as a challenge or a threat (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). Challenging stimulus can lead to positive outcomes such as motivation and improved task performance while threatening ones or distress can result in anxiety, depression, social dysfunction and even suicidal intention.

Along with the improvements during the scientific era and the rapid development of information, competitiveness among people has become increasingly intense, as a result people have become busier and therefore, stress is a natural consequence. Even though appropriate stress is a juncture for self-growth, it is also a motivation for people to progress actively. It not only affects our thoughts and feelings but our behavioural models, as well. However, overstress causes problems and discomfort, and can have serious effects on people.

The rate at which universities are established in Nigeria by not only the Federal and State governments but also by individuals and religious bodies is a totally welcome development which informs of the acceptance of education as the essential thrust for individual and national development. This nevertheless, has led each university into setting new goal in a bid to defend its existence as capable of having both competent staff and equally capable of producing the much needed professional manpower required by the nation. These then have placed great challenges on the academic staff which may likely cause stress especially if they are dissatisfied in the course of carrying out their duties.

Although a high level of stress has been observed in teachers generally, the higher education sector is a relatively new focus of concern. There is strong evidence to believe its workforce could represent a particularly vulnerable occupation group.

Most of what is known about stress amongst university workers is derived from several studies conducted in the USA. In Mitchell & Blix reported that 66 per cent of a large sample of university lecturers perceived severe levels of stress at work at least 50 per cent of the time. These authors concluded that most of the stress experienced by the respondents related directly to limited resources or shortage of time. There were, however, other causes for concern within the profession these ; included slow progress in career advancement, poor faculty communication, professional; disillusionment and inadequate salaries. Additional sources of academic pressure identified in the literature include heavy workload, role ambiguity, conflicting job demands, frequent interruptions, and striving for publication (Goldenburg & Waddell,2000). Further studies have concluded that a significant proportion of stress experienced by academics is likely to emanate from the competing demands of career and family life, and long working hours (both on and off campus) (Sprcinelli & Gregory,2007).

The negative effects of academic stress on psychological well-being have also been widely reported. For example, Blix and Mitchell (2004) stated that almost half of their respondents (48 per cent) reported psychological health problems resulting from work stress and that 84 per cent considered that their productivity and performance had been negatively affected. These authors cited depression and anxiety as the most critical stress-related symptoms reported.

Few large-scale investigations of workplace stress amongst university workers have been carried out in Britain. Most of what is known about the causes and consequences of stress for this occupational group is based on the results of surveys of staff from single institutions. Such literature as is available strongly suggests that occupational stress and job dissatisfaction are common features of academic life in Britain.

A large – scale investigation into attitudes to work conducted by Anthony in 2006 concluded that university staff were considerably more demoralized than members of the 20 other occupational groups investigated. Academics indicated that they felt less valued by their employers and reported lower levels of satisfaction and job security than other groups. Over 50 per cent of the university workers surveyed reported that their jobs stressed them all or most of the time. Unsatisfactory management practices were cited as the most significant cause of work-related stress: 58 per cent of respondents from academic backgrounds blamed management for their stress, compared with an average of 47 per cent for the sample as a whole. One in five admitted that they thought about leaving academia on a daily basis; an additional 20 per cent indicated that they had similar thoughts about once a week. Lower levels of psychological well-being than the norm were also evidenced: one – third of academics surveyed reported having felt depressed or very unhappy over the previous two weeks.

Nigeria as a developing country is evidently full of life threatening, harmful and chattering situations, which are stressful to peoples' existence and well-being, some of these include economic recession and instability, driving on very poorly maintained roads and highways, religious intolerance and insecurity, the menace of armed robbery and political tuggery. The University lecturers as citizens of the country experience all these phenomena along the professional and personal concerns related to their jobs. These concerns include lack of basic facilities for teaching, learning and research.

The entire Nigerian University communities have not been immuned from the emerging forces of stress in the country. Despite the nation's declaration of the importance of University education in national technological developments and the role it plays in satisfying manpower needs, there seems to be growing evidence that there are really no private, states or federal owned universities that will genuinely claim to enjoy the basic facilities and resources.

University teaching has traditionally been regarded as a low stress occupation. Although not highly paid, academics have been envied because they enjoyed tenure, light work load, flexibility, 'perk' such as overseas trips for study and/or conference purposes and the freedom to pursue their own research interests. During the past fifteen to twenty years many of these advantages seems to have been eroded in Nigerian Universities. Academic salaries have fallen in real terms in relation to current economic crises. Increasing numbers of academic positions are now untenured; work loads

have increased; and academics are under increased pressures to attract external funds for their research and to either 'publish or perish'. These could expose lecturers to such levels of stress that could force them to deviate from normal functioning.

Statement of the problem

The tertiary education system in Nigeria seems to be going through series of challenges. Probably the most challenge most ignored and least addressed is the problem of funding and financing tertiary education which has generated much stress among the university lecturers.

The UN agency recommended as high as 26% of Gross Domestic Product (GDP) to be devoted in the budget to education sector (Emezue, 2009) but the Federal Government in Nigeria seems to have been spending less than 7% of the Nations GDP on education.

Today, no Nigerian University ranks among the first 7,000 in the world. According to the Daily Trust editorial of March 19, 2009, "The recent ranking of World University by wobometrics rated Obafemi Awolowo University as 68th in Africa and 7.703rd in the world, with University of Ibadan coming 85th in Africa and 8, 619th in the world".

Learning environment in Nigerian Universities is seriously compromised by over-congested classrooms, over crowded laboratories, where the taps have no water and there is most of the time, no electricity to run the equipment. Laboratory reagents seem to cost too much for the school budget. Each year, thousands of students wear hood on graduation day, with not enough to take to the world. Research work has declined abysmally because of economic hard times.

Lecturers in Nigeria Universities are expected to perform at high level in the area of curriculum without the basic facilities for teaching, learning and research. Though the expectation is commendable, it is not always possible for lecturers to competently manage the diverse needs of students with the resource disabilities presently on ground in Nigerian Universities without stress. This situation needs to be addressed if Nigerian will advance technologically in this millennium and attain her vision 20:20:20.

Purpose of the study

The purpose of this research work is to contribute to knowledge and provided empirical evidence on the sources of stressors among University lecturers in Nigeria.

Research Question and Hypothesis

To guide the thrust of the study the following Research question and hypothesis were formulated. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 level of significance.

- (1) What are the sources of stress among Nigeria University Lecturers?
- (2) The perceived level of stress among male and female lecturers will not be significant different.

Methodology

The Research design employed in this study was the ex-post-facto. The research was conducted after the variations in the independent variables have occurred in the natural courses of events. The design involved a large number of persons and describes population characteristics by the selection of an unbiased sample.

The population for this study was all Nigerian University lecturers

The stratified randomly sampling technique was used to select the sample for this study

Eight Universities on the whole were used for the study. These consisted of Three (3) Federal Universities, Three (3) State Universities and Two (2) Private Universities. A total of three hundred and sixty-four (364) subjects consisting of 233 male and 141 female lecturers were used as sample for the study.

The stratified random sampling method was adopted in selecting the subjects variables under study. The numbers of subjects were selected according to the population of lecturers in the various universities sampled.

A self constructed questionnaire titled self-Report perceived stress Assessment Questionnaire (SRP SAQ) was used to elicit information from the respondents.

The instruments consist of 2 sections A and B.

Section A consist of 10 items requiring information about the lecturers sex, marital status, years of experience.

Section B consist of 30 items on various stress inducing factors to which the lecturers were required to indicate by a tick the degree to which these factors induce stress in them. They were requested to 'Strongly Agree', 'Agree' 'Disagree' or 'Strongly Disagree' with the items. The responses were scored: Strongly Agree – 4, Agree – 3, Disagree – 2 and Strongly Disagree – 1.

The initial items generated were scrutinized by experts in counseling psychology who made their contributions. The final copy of the items was agreed to have content validity.

The questionnaire was pilot tested by a test-re-rest method using 40 lecturers from one of the state universities who were not part of the sample. A reliability coefficient of 0.86 was obtained.

The researcher visited the different universities and was assisted by one assistant (lecturer) from each of the universities sampled. The questionnaires were handed over to these lecturers who helped to administer them in their own universities.

The questionnaires were collected by these lecturers and mailed back to the researcher. Four hundred questionnaires were administered on the subjects. The exercise lasted for about nine weeks. At the end of the exercise, 364 questionnaires were returned giving a rate of 91%.

The responses were analysed using percentages standard deviation and t-test.

H₀ The perceived level of stress among male and female lecturers will not be significantly different.

Table I

T-table of perceived level of stress among male and female Nigerian lecturers.

Variables	N	Mean	Std. Dev.	Df	t-cal	t-table	Remarks
Sex							
Male	223	98.23	12.56	357	0.426	1.645	Not Sig
Female	141	100.34	71.35	357	0.426	1.645	Not Sig

Table I reveals that the calculated t-value ($t = 0.426$) is lower than the t-table value ($t=1.645$). At $p < .05$ level of significance the perceived level of stress among male and female lecturers is not significantly different, though the calculated means for male (98.23) and female lecturers (100.34) shows a slightly higher perceived stress among female.

The hypothesis which states that the perceived level of stress among male and female lecturers will not be significantly different is retained.

The slightly higher perceived stress among female lecturers may be due to combining the home chores with the lecturing job.

Table II

Perceived Sources Of Stress Among University Lecturers

Variable Stress Factors	Mean	Max	%
Lack of instructional facilities	54.15	68	66.40
Lack of facilities for research	13.02	20	78.10
Lack of Holiday /annual leave	17.09	28.0	61.0
Time pressure and deadlines	15.96	22.0	57.00
Multiple role demand	9.29	16.00	51.00
Role ambiguity	6.20	17.45	38.20
Preparation of Examination results	7.56	18.20	52.34
Invigilations of Examination	8.62	18.00	54.52
State of lecturers office accommodation	62.15	68.00	81.32
Students continuous assessments	14.43	22.50	58.10
Grading and marking of papers	15.68	21.20	54.32

Students population	14.00	21.20	59.50
Leadership behavior of University Lecturers	13.00	22.00	53.02
Students projects/thesis supervision	17.08	30.00	77.52
Poor research/conference incentives	64.12	71.28	87.35
Lecture note preparation	12.55	20.00	52.21
Student classroom behavior	13.62	21.31	50.23
Criteria used for promotion	14.72	23.40	53.15
Administrative behavior of Non –academic staff	14.30	16.21	42.35
Delivery of lectures	16.43	20.40	45.60
Delays in release of promotion and entitlement	17.63	23.50	43.72
Setting examination questions	18.20	24.62	53.45
Participation in institutional administration	19.50	21.26	51.42
Relationship with students	20.62	24.50	44.62
Relationship with colleagues	17.82	28.00	33.50
Delay in payment of salaries	16.96	22.15	61.00
Participation in extra teaching to generate more generating money for self and the University	15.00	22.10	52.00
Normal teaching workload	24.54	28.02	57.00
School calendar interruption	9.28	17.00	58.62
Management unwillingness to meet lecturers demands	15.64	28.00	63.00
Stress	64.56	75.62	89.90

A look at table II indicate that academic experience the most stress from poor conferences/Research incentives (87.35% (followed by the state of lecturers office accommodation (81.32% (. Next to this is the lack of facilities for research (78.10%), closely followed by students project thesis supervision (77.52) while the least is relationship with fellow colleagues (33.50%). The table also show that (89.90%) of the sampled lecturers are wider stress.

Academic staff indicated stress from the university management (63.00%). The key to stress from university management could be viewed from the inter-face between the expectation has often resulted in strikes owing to delay and irregular payment of salary, poor work environment, lack of feedback and social supports as highlighted by Ofoegbu (2006).

The head of departments are middle managers when pressured by the higher management tend to transfer this pressure to academic staff who report directly to them. The performance pressure put on academic staff by the heads often results in stress as shown in this study. In line with this view, Ahsan, (2009), identified stress inducing factors on academic staff to include performance pressure. With regards to interpersonal relationship between academic staff and colleagues, the stress was quite minimal (33.2%) which is very acceptable, in any normal human relation.

Research being one of the primary activities of an academic staff in any university demands time, energy and finance. In this study, the major stress source to academic staff with respect to research is sourcing for research funds/grants (87.2%). Inadequate funding is a general problem in Nigerian university system, it therefore follows that research are scarce and very few access to it where available. Findings by Rutter, (2002), showed that sources of stress to academic staff included the pressure to secure financial support for research.

Discussion

The study was carried out to determine the sources of stress among Nigerian university lecturers.

The findings of research showed that the level of stress among male and female lecturers in Nigerian universities is significantly high (means = 98.23 and 100.34 respectively). This situation of stress among Nigerian lecturers supports the findings of Jarret (2007) who found that psychological strain was higher in academic staff than general staff. Blix & Mitchell (2004), Wiley (2005) and Jarvis (2002) also asserted that teachers experiences significant amount of stress in the course of performing their duties.

Nigerian lecturers are highly stressed when comparing the work environment of Nigerian University academic with elsewhere lecturers in Nigeria seem to be working in the old 'sugar cane plantains' during the slave trade era. Inadequate and deteriorating infrastructure and facilities which drastically limit the carrying capacity and increased enrolment of student which is the order of the day have made work very stressful for the lecturers. Government has been comfortable making meager salary increase to avert lecturers strikes without commensurate funding of infrastructure and facilities.

Students in most cases no longer carry out individual laboratory experiments rather they do group work due to dearth of reagents. In some cases, due to large number of students and the emptiness of laboratories, they are made to do "alternative" to practical works which is inadequate for this technological age.

In terms of take home pay Nigerian lecturers seem to earn grossly less than their counterparts in even other African countries. There is always constant stressful agitations for better conditions of service which usually end up in strikes. When universities reopen after strike, another set of problem emerge; either the semester is extended to make up for the lost ground or the semester is shortened and rush through. Quite often, students opt for the latter. But if the former was opted for the stress of poor attendance in class and restlessness on the part of the students is also experienced by the lecturers. In all this, the quality of academic work would be adversely affected and the credibility of the degrees to be ultimately awarded would be brought to question. Added to this is the stress of coping with the inevitable examination malpractice which would escalate devastating.

Counseling Implication

Stress in human results from inter actions between persons and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well-being.

Many researchers (Ross, 2003 and Goodman 2005) have observed that an emotionally disturbing situation triggers changes in the bio chemical and endocrinological systems of the body leading to the appearance of psychosomatic illnesses such as hypertension, indigestion, anxiety, depression stomach ulcers e.t.c. However, coping with the stress inducing factors that are beyond ones control is generally agreed to be possible through adequate counselling in other live a meaningful and productive life.

The lecturers seems to be helpless over the stressors they face on the campuses, therefore, it is counseled that adequate coping strategies need to be put in place in order for them to survive physically and emotionally as individuals. According to Lazarus (1975) the capacity of any situation to produce stress in an individual depends on the perception of such individual. He observed that stress reactions follows only when an individual "appraises" his current situation as stressful.

It is therefore counseled that lecturers adopt a cognitive redefinition coping strategy to survive these situations beyond their control. This a strategy by which an individual accepts the reality of the situation, but, restructure his mind toward it to find something favourable. Such strategies involve reminding oneself, that things could be worse, thinking oneself as well off with respect to other people concentrating on something good that might develop from the situation and altering values and priorities. Lecturers are also counseled to avoid emotion focused coping behavior which includes: verbal expression to let off steam especially with students, crying, smoking, overeating and engaging in impulse acting out as these may lead to more harmful psychosomatic illnesses.

Shapiro (1983) posits a need for control as a fundamental human drive. Hence individuals attempt to maintain a sense of control whether over life in general or over the outcome of specific situations. Lecturers are counseled to maintain control over their internal environment (their mind set) rather than trying to have control over their external environment (the campus situations). In cases where the lecturers have began to have symptom of psychosomatic illness as a result of stress, it is counselled that a visit to either a counselor or physician may be of help.

When the counsellor /doctor suspects that a patient's illness is connected to stress, he or she will take a careful history that includes stressors in the patient's life (family or employment problems, other illnesses, etc.). Many counsellor/ physicians will evaluate the patient's personality as well, in order to assess his or her coping resources and emotional response patterns. There are a

number of personality inventories and psychological tests that counselors can use to help diagnose the amount of stress that the patient experience and the coping strategies that he or she uses to deal with them. A variation on this theme is to identify what the patient perceives as threatening as well as stressful. Stress – related illness can be diagnosed by counselor who can refer to the primary care doctors, as well as well as to those who specialize in psychiatry. The doctor will need to distinguish between adjustment disorders and anxiety or mood disorders, and between psychiatric disorders and physical illnesses (e.g., thyroid activity) that also have psychological side effects.

Recent advances in the understanding of the many complex connections between the human mind and body have produced a variety of mainstream approach to stress-related illness. Present treatment regimes advocated by counselors may include the following.

- Medications. These may include drugs to control blood pressure or other physical symptoms of stress, as well as drugs that affect the patient's mood (tranquilizers or antidepressants).
- Stress management programs. These may be either individual or group treatments, and usually involve analysis of the stressors in the patient's life. They often focus on job or workplace-related stress.
- Behavioral approaches. These strategies include relaxation techniques, breathing exercises, and physical exercise programs including walking.
- Massage. Therapeutic massage relieves stress by relaxing the large groups of muscles in the back, neck, arms, and legs.
- Meditation and associated spiritual or religious practices. Recent studies have found positive correlations between these practices and stress hardiness (Wiley, 2005).

Treatment of stress is one area in which the boundaries between traditional and alternative therapies have changed in recent years, in part because some forms of physical exercise (voga, tai chi, aikido) that were once associated with the counterculture have become widely accepted as useful parts of mainstream stress reduction programs. Other alternatives therapies for stress that are occasionally recommended by mainstream medicine include aromatherapy, dance therapy, biofeedback, nutrition-based treatment (including dietary guidelines and nutritional supplements, acupuncture, homeopathy, and herbal medicine.

Complete prevention of stress on the campuses are neither possible nor desirable, because stress is an important stimulus of human growth and creativity, as well as an inevitable part of life. A persons ability to remain healthy in stressful situations require the development of stress hardiness – a cluster of personality traits that strengthen the individual's ability to cope. These may mean that lecturers need to develop such traits as viewing life situations and changes as positive opportunities rather than threats.

Universities among other things, provide the highest training grounds for the requisite human capital for national development. If Nigeria is to achieve her developmental goals therefore, she needs to adopt practices that may help to alleviate stress among university lecturers. It is counseled that the University executive should ensure that lecturers go on annual leave as at when due instead of engaging them in extra part time teaching programme to generate funds for the institution. Recreation facilities and social support packages should be boosted up in the university environment.

The Government on their part should look into the inadequate and deteriorating infrastructures. The collapsed municipal services (water, sewage, electric power and waste disposal etc.) should be addressed with all urgency.

Functional, well equipped counseling centres should be established in all Nigerian Universities. Here, competent counselors can offer professional services

Conclusion

The study has been able to identify several sources of stressors in Nigerian Campuses. These stress inducing factors precipitate stress in the lecturers in various degrees. It can be concluded that, should these stressors remain unattended to, the level of perceived stress among university lecturers will remain a permanent feature. This may be very detrimental not only to the individual lecturers but to the nation in general.

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