

STRESS AND ITS ASSOCIATED HEALTH PROBLEMS AMONG NON-ACADEMIC STAFF IN NIGERIAN UNIVERSITIES: A CASE STUDY OF UNIVERSITY OF PORT HARCOURT

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ABSTRACT

The quality and health of the workforce of every organization determine its operational efficiency and general organizational success. Therefore, this study examined stress and its associated Health problems among Non-Academic Staff in Nigerian Universities using university of Port Harcourt as a case study. Case study design was used for the study with a sample size of 673 non academic staff of whom 360 were senior staff members and 313 were junior staff. A 20 – item self constructed questionnaire was developed by the researchers. It had a general reliability coefficient of 0.87 using Cronbach alpha statistic four research questions were answered using mean and standard deviation while z-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses respectively. The findings revealed that friction health challenges and Antagonism with colleagues as key indicators of stressed worker. Stress impacts on productivity. The paper at the end recommended an urgent need to address these issues of poor interpersonal relations and other sources of stress so as to have a healthy workforce.

INTRODUCTION

Labour vulnerability due to its effects on human behaviour has generated greater concern in recent times. Contemporary human society is full of stressful experiences for the individual. Work like other human activities also goes with some form of stress. Life itself is not always smooth as individuals generally in daily transactions face one form of difficulty or painful experience. Therefore, stress being a commonplace as a result of urgency in the attendance of given responsibilities, can lead to disrupting individual worker's stability and thereby inducing in him/her a state of disorganized personality and behaviour which in turn could impact negatively on workplace and productivity.

The concept of stress is saddled with different definitions depending on the perspective of the actor. However, it could be explained as a physiological reaction caused by the perception of aversive situation. This situation can be hazardous to one's health. Looking at stress, Akinboye (1980) simply explained it to mean the body's response to any undesirable mental, physical, emotional and social situations. If one is find in this conflict, it may result in ability to resolve or satisfy a need. This may cause frustration. Indeed, frustration and stress are related (Udoh and Ajala, 2015). To Colman (2003) stress is seen as the psychological and physical strain or tension generated by physical, emotional, social, economic, or occupational circumstances, events or experiences that are difficult to manage or endure. Similarly, Lahey (2004) noted that it is any event or circumstance that strains or exceed a person's ability to cope. Oguntuashe (2007) describes stress as the most threatening event to man's quality of life. It is a feeling that is created when we react to particular events as the body rises to compliance and prepares to meet a tough situation with focus, strength, stamina and heightened alertness. To Akinade (2008) it is a pattern of cognitive appraisal, physiological

responses and behavioural tendencies that occur in a response to a perceived imbalance between situational demands and the resources needed to cope with them.

In the same vein Johiri (2008) described it as the body's non – specific response to any demand made on it. It is not by definition synonymous with nervous tension or anxiety. While presenting stress as our reaction to external events which can be positive or negative depending on how one reacts, he simply added that; it is the “general wear and tear of the body machine” that the body takes due to extra demands put on it. Stress is a double faced concept. On one side, it provides the means to express talents and energies and pursue happiness, on the other side it can also cause exhaustion and illness, either physical or psychological. For Amadi (2011), stress has been closely linked with major health problem and emotional strains which have greatly affected mankind generally. Stress according to Wikipedia the free encyclopedia (2015) is defined as a feeling of strain and pressure.

In the University school system, non academic staff like any other worker in an organization are saddled with different responsibilities ranging from registration of students, documentation of results, management of lecturers, files, writing minutes during meetings, taking charge of the school library, taking charge of school laboratory, school farm, school hostels, taking charge of the works unit, school clinic ensuring adequate security and so on. All these are enough to cause a normal person to weary and worn out after a day's activity and invariably dying slowly unnoticed to him and the employer. A look at the earlier explanation shows that stress could be a result of internal or external inidary factors. The World Health (2015) observed that external stress comes from outside us, while internal stress comes from inside of us and determine our body's ability to respond to external stress – inducing factors or stressors. Stress direction is detected based on where depression and pressure mounted on the individual are coming from. Internal stressors could be possible when an individual is not physiologically, emotionally, spiritually and mentally sound to handle arduous responsibility. It could also result from irrational thinking and pessimistic thoughts about life issues in the areas of marriage, land, building, home distance, traffic, house rent, school fees, and family up keep. The irrational, deep thought and moodiness on such conditions will be very good source of internal stressor. WHO (2015) summarily put internal stress to come from nutritional status, attitudes, thoughts, feelings of anger, fear and worry, anticipation, imagination, memory, overall health and fitness levels, presence of illness and infection, emotional well-being, amount of sleep and rest one gets. On the other hand, WHO (2015) has it that external stress comes from our physical environment, our job, noise, pollution with others, our home, situation challenges, difficulties and expectations we are confronted with on daily basis.

Stressed indicators cut across all facet of the human life ranging from the cognitive, emotional, physical and behavioural symptoms. The symptoms of stress are sometimes unnoticed but are gradually eating up the stressed. Some of these symptoms in clude moodiness, irritability or short temper, agitation, inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness and isolation, depression or general unhappiness, aches and pains, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, inability to concentrate, poor judgment, constant worrying, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, isolating yourself from others and nervous habits. All these could cause stressful situation which one must face and learn to cope with if it occurs or negatively, in the working place if not properly managed could cost the organization to lose huge amount of money. In order to manage stress in the workplace, the working environment is supposed to be conducive with, harmonious relationship, clearly stated and defined, prouision of job description radio/television and giving of welfare

packages based on agreement. Therefore to manage stress in the workplace stands an essential part of both individual and corporate responsibility.

Statement of Problem

Stress is a situation that is likely to be faced by any worker in his/her workplace. It could be destructive to the shift flow of activities in any organization by devastating the workers. In recent time, it has been a common thing to observe that many workers in their offices organization are being devastated by one psychological, physical strain or tension generated by physical, emotional, social, economic or occupational circumstances that seem not easy to manage.

Many workers in the Nigerian Universities who are expected to have known how to take care of their health because of their academic level social and economic status are seen to have one health problem or the other. Many are seen with depression, chest pain, inability to relax, rapid heartbeat, waist pain, isolation from others general aches and pain among others. Some with these conditions end up being emotionally or physically handicapped in life in severe cases, while some complain sick always and others lose their lives in untimely death. This stress as a result of work stress conditions and its associated health problems have left some many households without parents or guidance. The organization this individual work have also suffered immensely as productivity level faces devastation.

Therefore, as stress is inevitably unavoidable in the work places which the Nigerian universities are part of adequate attention should be accorded to this 'construct' in the day to day running of the universities organization. Hence the researchers are concerned on investigating the sources of stress among workers especially the non-academic staff, some psychological indicators, as impact of output and some of the control mechanisms to ensure maximum productivity among these non-academic staff in University of Port Harcourt River State.

Aim and Objectives

The aim of the study is to investigate stress and its associated health problems among non-academic staff in Nigerian Universities, University of Port Harcourt as a case study. Specifically the study sought to:

1. Find out the sources of stress among non-academic staff in University of Port Harcourt.
2. Determine the psychological indicators of a stressed non-academic staff in University of Port Harcourt.
3. Find out the impact of stress on productivity in the University of Port Harcourt.
4. Determine some control mechanisms of stress among non-academic in the University of Port Harcourt.

Research Questions

1. What are the sources of stress among non-academic staff in University of Port Harcourt?
2. What are the psychological indicators of a stressed worker in University of Port Harcourt?
3. How does stress problem impact on productivity in University of Port Harcourt?

4. What are the control mechanisms of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses are tested at 0.05 alpha level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior non-academic staff on the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.
2. There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the psychological indicators of a stressed workers in University of Port Harcourt.
3. There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on how stress problem impact on productivity.
4. There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the control mechanisms of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt

Methodology

The study adopted a case study design. The population of the study comprised all the 3365 non academic staff members in the 9 faculties of the University of Port Harcourt (1802 senior staff and 1563 junior staff). The sample size of the study comprised 673 non academic staff (360 senior staff and 313 junior staff). The multistage sampling approach using disproportionate stratified random sampling technique was used to arrive at the sample size. The researcher sampled 673 respondents from 3365 using 20% while 50% was used to sample 5 faculties out of population of 9 faculties. The researchers used a self constructed questionnaire titled “Uniport Non Academic Staff Stress Questionnaire (UPHSSQ). The instrument is structured after the modified Likert four points rating options of Strongly Agreed – 4, Agreed A – 3, Disagreed D – 2 and strongly disagreed SD – 1. Face and content validities were ensured on 20 items. The general reliability coefficient of 0.87 was established using cronbach alpha statistics. The mean, standard deviation and rank order statistics used to answer the research questions while z-test statistics was used to test the null hypotheses respectively.

RESULTS

Research Question One

What are the sources of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt?

Table 1: Weighted mean and rank order statistics of senior and junior academic staff members on the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.

S/N		Senior staff \bar{X}	Junior staff \bar{X}	Mean set \bar{X} \bar{X}	Rank	remark
1	The commonest source of stress in the worker is friction with departmental heads	3.66	3.47	3.57	1 st	Agreed
2	The major stress source is friction with fellow workers	3.45	3.20	3.33	4 th	Agreed
3	Irregular salary payments is a major stress source	3.45	3.49	3.47	2 nd	Agreed
4	Health challenges in the family are the greatest stressors	3.36	3.06	3.21	5 th	Agreed
5	Frequent threats of strike actions are significant stressors	3.59	3.24	3.42	3 rd	Agreed
	Grand mean	17.51	16.46	17.00		
		3.50	3.29	3.40		

Table 1 show that items with serial numbers 1 have various mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50, and are agreed by the respondents as the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.

Research Question Two

What are the key psychological indicators of a stressed worker in University of Port Harcourt?

Table 1: Weighted mean and rank order statistics on the key psychological indicators stressed non-academic staff in University of Port Harcourt.

S/N		Senior staff \bar{X}	Junior staff \bar{X}	Mean set \bar{X} \bar{X}	Rank	remark
6	A stressed worker in the university is usually antagonistic with colleagues	3.29	3.27	3.28	1 st	Agreed
7	A stressed worker is typically tensed up	3.15	3.08	3.12	3 rd	Agreed
8	A stressed worker displays pathological cardiovascular	2.31	2.03	2.17	5 th	Disagreed

	problems like high blood pressure					
9	A stressed worker is careless at work by making so many needless mistakes	3.11	2.95	3.03	4 th	Agreed
10	There is no way to identify a stressed university worker by mere physical appearance	3.48	3.08	3.28	1 st	Agreed
	Grand mean	15.34	14.41	14.88		
		3.07	2.88	2.98		

Table 2 shows that items with serial numbers 7 have mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and are therefore agreed by the respondents as the key psychological indicators of stressed workers in the University of Port Harcourt. While item with serial number 8 has mean value below the criterion mean value of 2.50 and therefore was disagreed by the respondents as the key psychological indicator of stressed workers in the University of Port Harcourt.

Research Question Three

How does stress problem impact on productivity in the University of Port Harcourt?

Table Three: Weighted mean and rank order statistics of senior and junior academic staff on the impact of stressed problem on productivity in University of Port Harcourt.

S/N		Senior staff \bar{X}	Junior staff \bar{X}	Mean set \bar{X} \bar{X}	Rank	remark
11	Stress fundamentally reduces workers productivity by reducing efficiency/devotion to duty in the University of Port Harcourt	3.28	3.44	3.36	2 nd	Agreed
12	Stress creates needless inter-staff friction that militates against productivity	3.85	3.39	3.62	1 st	Agreed
13	Staff-management friction is often due to communication problems induced by family stressors	1.12	1.56	1.34	5 th	Disagreed
14	Stress-induced sickness like hypertension lead to loss of man-hour due	3.03	3.25	3.14	3 rd	Agreed

	to frequent sick leaves					
15	Stressors have no significant impact on the productivity of the university workers	2.28	1.96	2.12	4 th	Disagreed
	Grand mean	13.56	13.60	13.58		
		2.71	2.72	2.72		

Table 3 reveals that items with serial numbers 11 have mean values above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and are therefore agreed by the respondents as the how stress problem impact on productivity in the University of Port Harcourt. While items with serial numbers 13 and 15 have various mean values below the criterion mean value of 2.50 and were therefore disagreed by the respondents as the how stress problem impact on productivity in the University of Port Harcourt.

Table 4: Weighted mean and rank order statistics of senior and junior non academic staff on the control mechanisms of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt.

S/N		Senior staff \bar{X}	Junior staff \bar{X}	Mean set \bar{X} \bar{X}	Rank	remark
16	Regular in house stress workshop ensures.	3.43	3.44	3.44	1 st	Agreed
17	Prompt and regular payment of staff salaries increase efficiency among workers.	3.33	3.36	3.35	2 nd	Agreed
18	Opening of well equipped counselling centres can help to control stress among workers.	2.98	3.27	3.13	4 th	Agreed
19	Participation in decision making leads to dedication and efficiency among workers	3.31	3.28	3.29	3 rd	Agreed
20	Monitoring of appropriate social welfare programmes in the university communities enhances workers assurance and dedication to employer.	2.78	2.87	2.83	5 th	Agreed
	Grand mean	15.83	16.22	3.21		
		3.17	3.24			

Table 4 reveals that items 16 have mean value above the criterion mean value of 2.50 and are therefore were agreed by the respondents as the control mechanisms of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.

Hypotheses One

There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.

Table 5: z-test mean difference between senior and junior non academic staff on the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Senior non academic staff	360	3.50	1.08	671	2.63	1.96	Statistically significant
Junior non academic staff	313	3.29	1.07				

Table 5 shows that senior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 3.50 and 1.08 while junior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 3.29 and 1.07 respectively. With a df of 671 and at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-value of 2.63 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. By implication, there is a significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the sources of stress among workers in University of Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis Two

There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the psychological indicators of a stressed worker in University of Port Harcourt.

Table 6: z-test mean difference between senior and junior non academic staff on the psychological indicators of a stressed worker in University of Port Harcourt

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Senior non academic staff	360	3.07	0.94	671	2.71	1.96	Statistically significant
Junior non academic staff	313	2.88	0.99				

Table 6 shows that senior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 3.07 and 0.94 while junior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 2.88 and

0.99 respectively. With a df of 671 and at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-value of 2.71 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis is rejected. By implication, there is a significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the psychological indicators of a stressed worker in University of Port Harcourt.

Hypothesis Three

There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on how stress problem impact on productivity.

Table 7: z-test mean difference between senior and junior non academic staff on how stress problem impact on productivity

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Senior non academic staff	360	2.71	1.07	671	1.43	1.96	Statistically significant
Junior non academic staff	313	2.72	1.15				

Table 7 shows that senior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 2.71 and 1.07 while junior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 2.72 and 1.15 respectively. With a df of 671 and at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-value of 1.43 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on how stress problem impact on productivity.

Hypothesis Four

There is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff on the control mechanisms of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt.

Table 8: z-test mean difference between senior and junior non academic staff on the control mechanisms of stress among workers in the University of Port Harcourt.

Category	N	\bar{X}	SD	Df	z-cal	z-crit	Remark
Senior non academic staff	360	3.17	1.27	671	2.78	1.96	Statistically significant
Junior non academic staff	313	3.24	1.05				

Table 8 shows that senior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 2.71 and 1.27 while the junior non academic staff has mean and standard deviation scores of 3.24 and 1.05 respectively. With a df of 671 and at an alpha level of 0.05 level of significance, the calculated z-value of 0.78 is greater than the z-critical value of 1.96. Therefore, the null hypothesis is accepted. By implication, there is no significant difference between the mean perceptions of senior and junior academic staff.

SUMMARY OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study are summarized as shown below

1. The sources of stress among workers in the university are through: the friction with departmental heads; friction with fellow workers; health challenges and frequent strike actions.
2. The key indicators of psychologically stressed workers are: antagonism with colleagues; tensed up and careless at work by making so many needless mistakes.
3. The stress impacts on productivity are that: stress reduces devotion to duty in the university; it creates needless inter-staff friction that militates against productivity; stressed-induced sickness like hypertension leads to loss of man hour due to frequent sick leaves.
4. The various ways to control for stress are through regular in house stress workshop; regular salary payments; staff counselling; participation in decision making and appropriate staff social welfare programmes in the university.

DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The Sources of Stress in the University

The findings revealed that the sources of stress among workers in the university are: the friction with departmental heads; friction with fellow workers; health challenges and frequent strike actions. The findings agree with Douglas Mental Health University Institute (2015) that stress could be caused by loss of control, new situations, unpredictability, a threat to the ego, anticipation of negative consequences and ambiguous situations. In addition to what is stated above, Douglas Mental Health University Institute (2015) opined that illness can be caused due to chronic stress, especially if the stress occurs in tandem with familial, environmental, hereditary and personal factors that encourage its presence.

The key indicators of stressed worker

The study revealed that the key indicators of psychologically stressed workers are: antagonism with colleagues; tensed up and careless at work by making so many needless mistakes. A worker that is stressed up is easily noticed by the type of quirky character such person will be exhibiting. The identified factors are in tandem with the assertion of HELPGUIDE.ORG (n.d) that moodiness, irritability or short temper, agitation, inability to relax, feeling overwhelmed, sense of loneliness and isolation, depression or general unhappiness, aches and pains, nausea, dizziness, chest pain, rapid heartbeat, inability to concentrate, poor judgment, constant worrying, procrastinating or neglecting responsibilities, isolating yourself from others and nervous habits are the signs a worker. Moreso, Ghaleb and Thuria in Imtiaz and Ahmad (n.d) rightly put it that stress has a wide psychological and physical effect as cardiovascular, musculoskeletal systems, headache, gastrointestinal problems, sleep disturbance and dipression.

The Stress Impact on Productivity

The study revealed that stress impacts on productivity are: stress reduces devotion to duty in the university; it creates needless inter-staff friction that militates against productivity; stressed-induced sickness like hypertension leads to loss of man hour due to frequent sick leaves. Having identified the sources stressed is not enough but stems to the extent of impairment in productivity. Meneze (2005) has it that misfit with organization, no part in decision making, were reported main causes of stress as well no control over work environment, personality traits, lack of relaxation along with ambiguous rules affect employees performance. mechie (2002) submitted that stress can undermine the achievement of goals, both for individuals and for organizations.

Stress Control Mechanisms

The various ways to control for stress are through regular in house stress workshop; regular salary payments; staff counseling; participation in decision making and appropriate staff social welfare programmes in the university. Mechie (2002) reported that stress can be managed through training and one-to-one psychology services-clinical, occupational, health or counseling.

CONCLUSION

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that non academic staff of the university is faced with stress threatening health problems that can hamper productivity in their various areas of specialization, thereby, making work a hassle. There is an urgent need to address these issues of poor interpersonal relations and other sources of stress so as to have a healthy work force in the university.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the Findings it was recommended that:

1. Non academic staff of the university should be given enough time to do a task based on job schedule in order to reduce the sources of stress.
2. Electronic stress checkers and indicator should be mounted in the various departments for the workers to place themselves on regular check up before and after work.
3. Workers that are already stressed up should be given small time for recreation in order not to make a devastating mistake.
4. Seminars and workshops should be held for the deans and head of department on personnel management in order for them to achieve efficiency and reduce friction between them and their non academic counterparts.
5. The health centres in the university should be well equipped, so that health issues could be handled properly.
6. Recreational facilities should be built and furnished properly.
7. Leave grants, over time allowances and other incentive should be given to staff in order to motivate them.

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