Workplace Stress Among Nigerian Academics: A Survey of Selected Public Universities in Nigeria

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Abstract
The paper examined the sources of workplace stress among the academic staff of the Nigerian public universities. The study adopted qualitative approach of semi-structured interview method to collect data, which involved all cadres of the academics both senior and junior from two (2) universities that were chosen from the six (6) geo-political zones of the country. The finding showed that work demands such as script marking, teaching as well as inter-personal relationship and working conditions were the potential sources of stress and major concerns of the academics in the Nigerian universities. The results also indicated that realities of job stress on the academics were the major sources of health challenges and even death. The study thus emphasized the importance of stress management as key element in overall employee satisfaction, commitment and productivity. It also emphasized a healthy work environment that will include well-planned implementation strategies of well managed stress programs that will positively impact both the employees and the organizations respectively.

Key Words: *Nigerian academics, Nigerian Public Universities, Workplace stress.*

Introduction

There is growing concern about workplace stress in the world today; due to globalization and global communication with its resultant negative impacts on individuals and organizations (Haratani and Kawakami, 1999). While the developed countries are doing a lot to tide the menace, the developing economies that are worst hit are doing less in this regard to arrest the situation as attested to in the dearth of researches conducted, for example, in the Nigerian Contextual environment (Adeoye and Durosaro 2012). Organizational workplace stress has been linked to organizational challenges and problems such as job performance, sudden death, drug abuse, frustration, poor relationships with co-workers, subordinates and /or superiors (Williams et.al. 2001, Hans Selye, 1974). Consequent upon these challenges, researchers are becoming more intensified in their research efforts to unravel the negative and positive effects of this syndrome on employees and organizations so that organizations will be a better place to work (Karl, 2006)

Concomitantly therefore, understanding of the factors that specifically contribute to the stress of the Nigerian academics in the workplace is sacrosanct for improving the stress management programs of the Nigerian universities. However, in spite of the world wide academic and research interests on stress, in the work environment, less published works have explored the specific factors that mostly impact the stress experience of the academics in the Nigerian university

settings. Aside, even if much research works have been done in this regard, there have been less efforts by these organizations to address the negative impacts on its workforce. This could be explained in a situation where there are inadequate institutional arrangements if any that have been put in place to ameliorate the stress dispositions of the workforce. Consequently, due to this inadequacy, in the Nigerian university's contextual environments, the present study hopes to fill the existing gap by extending the body of knowledge in this area.

Literature Review

The changing nature of work across the globe due to advance in information technology (I.T), more international industrial competitions and the world economic melt-down has put new challenges on organizations and employees in the world of work (Cox and Griffiths, 2010). Thus, this has resulted in unprecedented stressful work environments as workers have to compete, adapt and learn new skills to satisfy the requirements of their work (Cox and Griffiths, 1995). The psychological stressors resulting from this have implicated many physical and psychological risk factors which include anxiety, depression, fatigue, heart disease and work-family conflicts (George and Andrew, 2008). Hence, organizations and employees suffer serious consequences resulting in the decreased productivity, high turnover, absenteeism, strikes and low morals. The stressful work environment also have both economic and health implications, for example, it was found in the literature that the misuse of alcohol in the U.K was related to stress in some workers and this have caused the economy an estimated costs of €2.2 billion due to sickness and turn-over (George and Andrew, 2008). Also, it was found that stressors at work in the U.S cost the economy over $47 billion and 200 million lost working days per year (Gabriel, 2000). The aforementioned statistics show how devastating the incidence of stress could be to the health of employees and the organizations in both the developed and the less developed economies particularly in the under-developed world where there is no accurate data on the menace of stress. Hence, there is a great need therefore to put in place certain arrangements that will expose and showcase the tragic trend that could devastate the life of growing organizations and workers in the less developed world.

Stress of Academics in Higher Educational Institutions

The 21st century has created a knowledge-based economy and has highly rated the academics as the repository and gate keepers of knowledge for societal development (Sherman. 2011). This rating has put higher education in its prominence in terms of relevance. Thus, there have been massive allocation of funds across the globe to develop the educational systems (Rothmanbin et.al. 2013) Consequently, the recognition accorded the higher educational sector as repository of knowledge has brought competitive challenges that range from work conflicts, work overload; resource constraints among the university academics (Sherman, 2011) Aside, the university academics are facing social stressors borne out of their day to day interactions with their colleagues, students and superiors (Winefield, 2008). However, just like other professionals, academics too experience a mismatch between work and ability to cope thus resulting to both physical and psychological stress that eventually affect their job performance (Fisher, 2011). Notwithstanding this, apart from the academics key performance indicators, they are also involved in lecturing, supervisions, research as well as administrative functions which place enormous job demands on them thus and ultimately become potential stressors, with its negative consequences on their well-being, job satisfaction, affective commitment and turn-over intentions (Panatik, 2010).

Moreover, the last two decades have witnessed a change in the earlier popular belief that academic profession is stress free, but has now been tagged as stress strongholds (Fisher, 2011). Furthermore, researchers in different countries of the world have identified key academic stressors and dimensions of stress and their mediating factors (Cox and Griffith, 2010). Hence, literature is vast with studies relating to high stress levels that have been implicated among academics such as excessive workload, home-work interface, anxiety, burn-out, depression, muscle pain and sleeping problems (Panatik, 2010). In addition, Rothmanbin et al. (2010) argued that academic employees of low cadres and unmarried suffer job performance and emotional intelligence resulting from role conflict, ambiguity and excessive workload. In a related study, Siti et.al (2012) identified psycho-social work characteristics as dominant stressors that influence academic employee's well-being and attitudes in Malaysian universities. Their other findings also show that job demands are significant predictors of academic employee's psychological strains. They equally identified pay and benefits, overload, work-life balance as predictors of academic high stress levels (Barkhuizen and Rothman, 2013). Their findings were supported by the works of Winfield et.al (2008) and Kayatha and Kayatha (2012).

In overall, from the various findings, it could be deduced that job stress manifests variously in the academic setting contrary to the popular belief that higher education sector is stress free. The different findings of the various authors regarding the university stress and burnout confirm that higher educational institutions like other professions operate in their contextual cultural environments that could provoke different stress outcomes (Panatik, 2010).

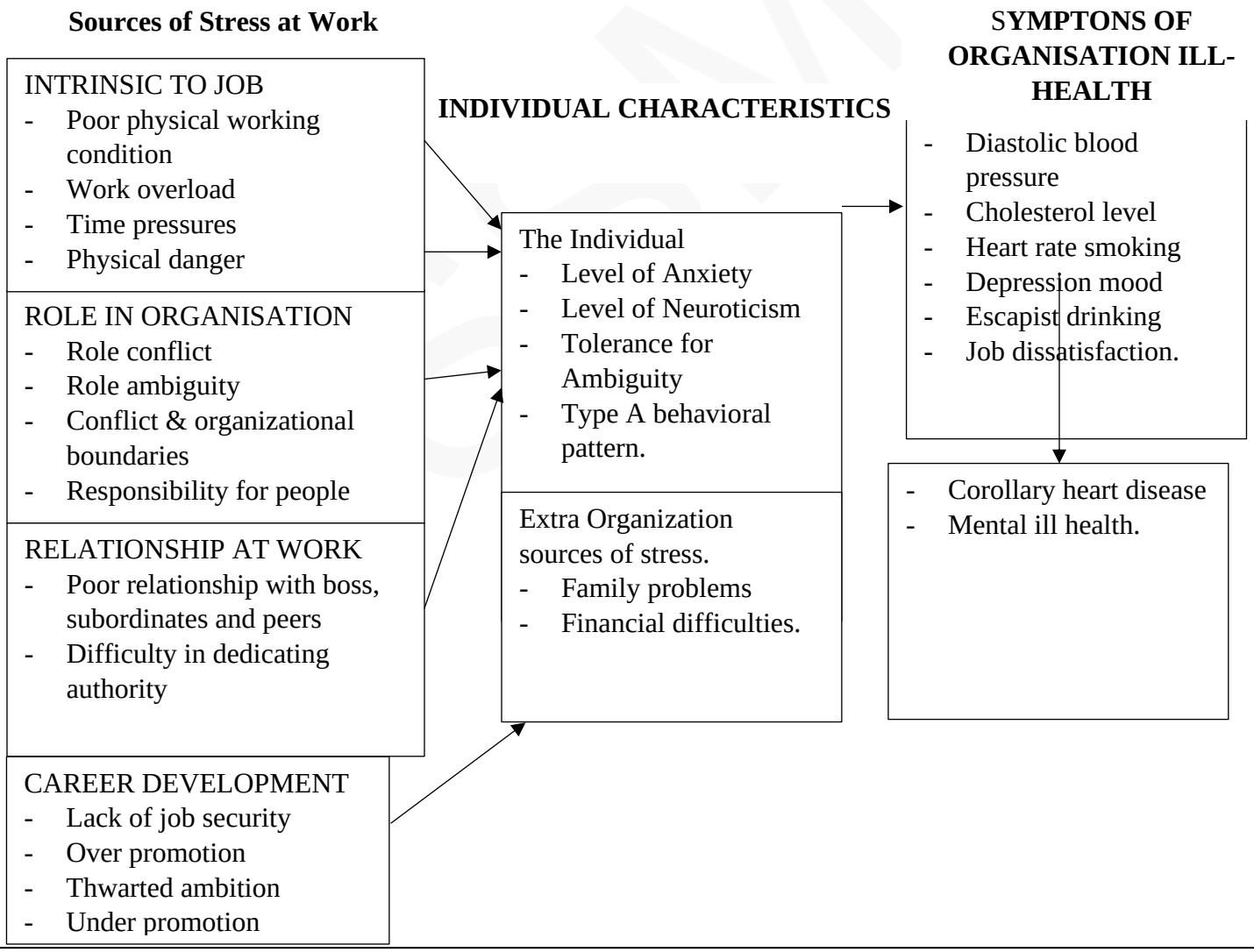
Stress of Academics in Nigerian Universities.

The recognition accorded education as a relevant and potent tool for personal and national development in Nigeria witnessed the mushrooming of universities by the central and state governments including private individuals and religious bodies. (Omoniyi, 2013). However, this proliferation has given rise to competitions and struggles among the universities in an attempt to re-define new goals in order to produce the much-needed human resource and manpower requirements of the country (Omoniyi, 2013). Invariably, these new challenges have become a potential source of strain and stress for the Nigerian academics.

Consequently, these developments have faulted the notion that has regarded teaching generally as "stress free" and have come to re-define the profession as "Stress Strongholds" (Fisher, 2011). Notwithstanding, there are currently life-threatening events in the Nigeria contextual environments that are stressful to peoples' existence and well-being in which Nigerian academics are equally exposed to (Adeoye and Durosaro, 2012). Such events are insecurity (e.g. Boko Haram insurgency), kidnapping, religious intolerance, armed robbery, ritualism and congested and over-crowded laboratories (Kayatha and Kayatha, 2012). Furthermore, and apart from these general factors identified as potential sources of stress, in the Nigerian universities environments, researchers have also identified specific factors that could be potential source of stress to academic settings such as heavy workload, long working hours, role ambiguity, role conflicts, conflicts between home and work, publish or "Perish" syndrome and slow progress in career development (Omoniyi, 2013). Also, other sources of stress identified include problem of funding and financing the educational systems as recommended by the United Nations (UN), showing the statistics of 26% of the GDP recommended by the UN agency as against the less than 7% being implemented by the Nigerian government (Emezue, 2009). In a related work of Adebiyi (2013), variables such as unfavorable student –staff ratio, lack of recognition and reward, poor management and role ambiguity were identified as correlates of stress in the Nigerian universities. Similarly, Archibong

et.al (2010), Adeoye et.al (2012) identified inter-personal relationship, research, teaching, career development, administrative demand, work-schedule, environmental factors and recreational facilities as good predictors of stress. Likewise, Anazodo et.al (2012) identified inadequate administrative support, poor working conditions, poor remunerations, poor infrastructure and instructional facilities, work life balance and workload as sources of stressors and stress to the Nigerian university academics. Consequently, the costs of these, correlates significantly with the health, emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishments, fatigue, lowered mental health, alliteration and high incidence of absenteeism and attrition of the Nigerian academics (Anzodo et.al, 2012). Overall, stress all over the world is a cancer-worm that people have come to live with on a daily basis. The literature so far reviewed on stress showed that after-all, higher educational institutions are not stress free as generally known. However, the causes of stress are environment specific and relate differently to different contextual environments. Therefore, each educational context has its specific stressors resulting from the peculiarity of its environment. Hence, this study hopes to examine the specific sources of stress in the Nigerian university's contextual environments among the academic employees.

A Model of Stress at Work



Source: Cooper & Marshall (1976: 12)

Methodology

The study employs qualitative approach in the analysis. Qualitative methods include interviewing, participant observations, ethnographic study and field work but interview approach is adopted in the present situation. Interview technique immerses the researcher in a research setting to give meaning and significance to what is being researched as it involves person-to- person interactions. Qualitative approach allows in-depth investigation into a phenomenon of interest to elicit attention to details, context and nuance. The present study adopts semi-structure interview method, to collect data. The data collection involves all academics both junior and senior cadres that are engaged on-one on one basis to assist in interpreting espouse values and the way things are done in the universities. The study engages lecturers of different cadres in the two universities that are chosen from the six (6) geo-political zones of the country which includes university of Lagos (south west), and university of Ilorin (north central). These are all public universities that operate under the same guidelines set by the national universities commission (NUC) of Nigeria. The interview consists of eight sets of semi structured questions to the interviewees in the two (2) Universities. The questions center on the model of marshal and cooper (1976) on organization culture and stress that involve variables such as relationship at work, home-work interface, work overload, length of service, environmental factors, academic activities and career development. All the questions are clearly phrased to remove ambiguity and enhance understanding.

The study employs non-probabilistic technique of purposive sampling which enables the researcher to move from one zone to the other to conduct the interviews. Twenty (20) respondents overall participate in the interview process in the selected universities which entails tape recording and personal notes, which are later literally transcribed. The process gets the permission and consent of the respondents.

Data Analysis

The presentation of the results from the interview process is as shown:

Could you identify the specific stress being encountered by academic staff in the performance of their duties?

Various stressors were identified by the respondents.
These range from Excessive scripts making (20%), work-overload (13%),
unconducive work environment (10%), Administrative work, incessant strikes
and meeting work deadlines (7%)

Do work demands such as teaching, marking, research and publishing for promotion contribute to stress?

The entire respondents believed that all academic works provoke stress.
Of the total variance, marking (46.66%) had the highest followed by
teaching, (23.33%), ''Publish or Perish'' syndromes had (16.66%), while
administrative work had (13.33%).

Do environmental factors such as poor infrastructure, electricity, ill-equipped offices contribute to stress?

All the participants agree with this. Of the factors, electricity and heat
had the most impactful effects in terms of stress provocation with 30% of

the variance followed by inadequate research facilities like internet, poor ventilation with 20% of the variance, followed by ill-equipped offices with 16.66% while teaching space had 13.33% of the total variance.

What are the effects of inter- personal relationship at work between and among academic staff as well as the management and students on the stress experience of the academics?
53.33% of the responses agreed that the relationships could provoke stress while 46.6% indicated the relationship between the stakeholders cannot cause stress.

What are the perceived realities and consequences of job stress on the academics?
Health challenges are the most frequently occurring consequence with 20% of the variance, followed by emotional challenge and death with 13.33% each. Poor student performances had 10% followed by short life span, job dissatisfaction, depression and stroke with 6.66% respectively while memory loss or forget fullness and fainting accounted for 3.33% each of the total variance.

Do you often work at home on office work and what is the effect of such on your work life balance (WLB).
83.33% of the responses experienced negative impact on them work-life balance (WLB). 10% partially agreed because they only take work home on deadlines while 6.66% said their works start and end in the office.

Discussion of the Findings
A semi structured type of interview was administered to the respondents and was conducted to probe deeply into work place stress on the Nigerian academics. The interview questions were properly phrased to avoid bias and to promote reliability (Saunders et.tal., 2009). The interview questions had a minimum of 20 minutes. 20 (twenty) participants were interviewed comprising 12 males and 08 females that cut across various cadres from professors down to the assistant lecturers which is consistent with the suggestion of Cameron and Freeman (2004).
The following are the discussions of the interview process:

Psycho-Social Environment of Work.
Question 6 was designed to examine the effects of work demands such as teaching, research and marking and their effects on the stress experience of the academics. Marking which has the highest number of responses was expressed by some interviewees in these manners.
Of all the work demands, marking contributes most to stress experience because of the number of student scripts and the deadlines, usually fixed for submission of those scripts (Lecturer 1, with 8 years' experience).

Also, another interviewee expressed thus:
Work demands contribute to the stress levels of the lecturers. Although, marking of scripts of students contributes more because it is the most tedious in respect of the number scripts involved. A female lecturer died recently while marking scripts that are over 700

(A senior lecturer with 15 years' experience)

The common themes here expressed by most of the lecturers is the marking of scripts which they perceive as having detrimental effects on their well-being and provoke stress. They portend that other demands such as research can result to stress but with less severity as no deadline is set within which to complete the research work.

The work demands have been variously supported in the literature to be potential sources of stress (eg Siti et.al., 2012, Mohd, 2011, Osipow, 1998). The challenges in marking in the Nigerian universities may be attributed to the failure of the institution to adhere to the international standard of staff-student ratio and the insufficient time available to do the marking. Teaching was also discovered to be a potential source of stress as expressed by some of the interviewees. Teaching was described as not only requires the ''heads'' of the teaching staff but also their ''hearts'' and therefore require emotional commitments, failure of which could result to burnout and Stress.

Question 7 examines the work environmental factors such as Electricity supply, ill equipped offices and poor infrastructure and their effects on the stress experience of the academics. One of the interviewees expressed his opinions thus:

The case of academics dropping dead suddenly has happened severally
in this University due to work environmental challenges and the management
insensitive to the provision of infrastructural and institutional facilities
(Professor of more than 30 years' experience)

The impact of these challenges has been expressed variously in the literature (e.g. Fauziah,et.al. 2013). These Unconducive academic work environments in Nigeria has been attributed to emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and depersonalization of the academics (Olaitan et .al.2010). However, in the contextual Nigerian environments, it has been found by (eg, Omoniyi,2013) that life threatening events such as poor roads, overcrowded laboratories, congested classrooms, electricity failures are phenomena affecting the teaching capabilities of the academics. Apart from the management insensitivity to infrastructural provisions, other extraneous factors such as poor road networks and electricity failures are identified as other major factors that have contributed to the stress experience of the academics in the Nigerian universities.

Question 8 addresses the interpersonal relationship at work between and among academic staff, superiors, students and their relationship to the stress experience of the Nigerian academics. One of the interviewees expressed it thus:

The relationship among colleagues can at times lead to stress particularly
when you are dragged into matters you know nothing about or at times
say ill of you to the head of department or the superiors you are not close with.
The relationships with students depend on the individual lecturers particularly
the way you handle them. So, it is yes or No (Snr. lecturer, with 10years experience).

Another expressed it this way:

The stress in relationship happens when the superior are not getting
the desired results from the junior ones. Also, it can result to stress
particularly when lecturers that are appointed the same year are not
enjoying equal promotions while some are promoted others are not even
with the same journal publications (Lecturer1 with 6years experience).

The expressions of the two lecturers bring in the picture of internal politics in the academic environments which could result to strain and stress but are expressed differently by the academics.

Interestingly, these findings follow the findings in the literature (e.g. Cooper and Marshal,1979, Ospow,1998, and Cope, 2003), which confirmed that lack of social support from the superiors and organizations as well as internal wranglings within organisations are stressors for most workers in the work place and which Nigerian academics cannot be exonerated from..

Conclusion

Overall, the various responses analyzed indicated that generally, Nigerian academics are faced with the same sources of stress in their respective Universities. The contributions of variables such as environmental factors, work demands, interpersonal relationships and realities of job stress are significantly important to the stress experience of the Nigerian academics. It is thus worthy to emphasize the importance of stress management as key element in overall employee satisfaction, commitment and Productivity. The findings of the study could thus serve as a road map in implementing a healthy work environment that will inculcate a well-planned implementation strategies that will give premium to a well-managed stress programs that can provide fruitful results to both the employees and the organizations, and in this respect, the Nigerian universities contextual work environments.

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