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Influence of Perceived Job Tension on Stress Reaction Among Hospital and University Workers in Nigeria

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Abstract

The influence of perceived job tension on stress reaction among hospital and university workers in Nigeria was the focus of this study. 160 participants randomly selected from hospital and university settings were used for the study. The age of the participants ranges between 25 years and 50 years with a mean age of 35. Four hypotheses were tested and results shows that job stress is directly proportional to personal distress. Also, no significant difference was found in the job related tension between hospital and university workers. Result of this study shows that females have the same perception of work environment and they react to stress in the same manner. However, a significant difference exists in the level of stress between female and male university workers.

Key words : 1. Job tension: The rigours and stress workers undergo on the job. 2. Stress reaction: It is the way workers react to stress on the job. This could be positive or negative. 3. Stress: It is the unfavorable conditions that workers pass through in the course of discharging their job duties. 4. Stressors: These are conditions that bring about stress on the job.

Introduction

Stress is the result of an individual perception that does not have the resources to cope with a perceived situation from the past, present or future. It is caused by fear and the reaction to fear is to fight or flight. In basic terms, stress is an aspect of living that can be beneficial when it motivates, encourages, changes or inspires, but can be opposite when

it does not. The stress which people complain about makes them to perform less well, and it is a feeling of tension or pressure experienced when they feel that the demands placed on them exceed the resources they have in order to meet the demands. Stress has an unavoidable effect on the living and it is an especially complex phenomenon in

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modern technological society. There is little doubt that an individual's success or failure in controlling potentially stressful situations can have profound effect on his ability to function. People react to the same stressor differently, while some will cope with it, some other might not.

The issue of perception of tension on the job and the resulting response or reaction to stress is a phenomenon that has been plaguing management of organizations and their workers both consciously and unconsciously. The underlying tension that exists in most organizations as a result of differences in personality styles, battle for power and clashes with authority are some of the things that makes it harder and harder for some workers to get up and go to work each day. Workers at times do not perform up to expectation or required standard in job situation because of their attitude to work that is perceived to be stressful and thereby reacting accordingly and also because they are stressed out by the nature of work or tasks being carried out.

It should be noted that the state of equilibrium or disequilibrium of a person's health will affect his/her productivity at work. Barsade and Wiesenfeld (1997) described stress related illness in a fashion similar to that of Selye's 3 phase of General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS). The Alarm resistance is followed by counter attack during which the individuals defence mechanisms become active. If however the stress continues or the

defence does not work, he will move to the third stage of exhaustion when adaptive mechanisms collapse. Sauter, Murphy and Hurrell (1990) argued that individual differences in the response to stress are function of the person's cognitive appraisal- his/her evaluation through thought process of a potentially stressful event or situation. It is this process that determines how positive or negative his/her stress reaction will be, what emotions he./she will experience and what adaptive response he/she will make (Sauter, Hurrell, Murphy and Levi, 1997).

The cognitive appraisal process is affected by emotional reactions. If the situation is evaluated as stressful, there may be negative emotional responses such as anxiety anger or depression. Wyler, Masuda and Holmes (1971) found stronger physiological and more negative psychological responses when a stress task was seen as threatening than when participants viewed it as challenging. To be alive is to be constantly exposed to stressors. Numerous studies in recent years have focused on role conflict and ambiguity as major sources of stress at work and as useful concepts in understanding the relationship between job characteristics and workers behavior. Khan, Wolfe, Quinn, Snock and Rosenths (1964) and House & Rizzo, (1972) suggested that role conflict and ambiguity operate as intervening variables between original and personality variables. The magnitude is determined by organizational and task variables as well as by certain personal-

ity predispositions. Masuda and Holmes (1976) found that both managers and workers who felt under pressure most reported that their supervisors always ruled with an iron hand and rarely tried out new ideas or allowed participation in decision-making. Managers who were under stress also reported that their supervisors never allowed the persons under them to do their job in the way they thought best. Elisburg (1995) found that non-participation at work among a national representative sample of over 1,400 workers was the consistent and significant indicator of strain and job related stress. He further suggested that the long periods of activity, lack of opportunity for rest, strenuous and heavy work are considered as being conducive to the development of fatigue. Hammer and Tosi (1974) found that men who suffered from role ambiguity experience lower job satisfaction, higher job tension, greater futility and lower self confidence. Stress indicators related to ambiguity are depressed mood and lower self-esteem. Comparing men and women at similar occupational levels, Hammer and Tosi (1974) found that women reported more symptoms of stress than men, such as feeling depressed, having nightmares, feeling overwhelmed and experiencing stomach upset.

Materials and Methods

Participants

The participants for this study were randomly selected from two universities namely:

University of Ado-Ekiti in Ekiti state University of Lagos in Lagos state, all in Nigeria (comprising of non-academic staff) and two hospitals namely: State Specialist Hospital, Ado-Ekiti in Ekiti state and Lagos State Teaching Hospital, Ikeja in Lagos state (comprising of administrative and nursing staff). A total number of 160 participants were used for this study (80 each from university and hospital settings comprising of 40 males and 40 females respectively). Their age ranges between 25 years and 50 years.

Hypotheses

1. There will be a significant relationship between personal distress and job stress among the workers.
2. University workers will report a significant job related tension than hospital workers.
3. There will be a significant difference in the level of stress between female university workers and female hospital workers.
4. There will be a significant difference in the level of stress between male and female workers.

Instrument

Symptom Distress Checklist -90 (SCL-90) developed by Derogatis, Lipman and Covi (1973) was used to measure reactions to stress. Erinoshio (1996) provided the proper-

ties for Nigerian samples with the reliability alpha co-efficient of .77 for psychoticism and .90 for depression. Job tension was measured by using job related Tension (JT), a questionnaire consisting of 15 items developed by Kahn,*et al* (1964) with a reliability co-efficient alpha of .39 and concurrent validity co-efficient of .46

Design

The ex-post facto design was adopted. The independent variable is the job tension while stress reaction serves as the dependent variable.

Statistical analysis

The Pearson correlation coefficient and the t-test for independent groups were used to test the hypotheses.

Results

Results of data collected are presented in table form below:

Table I. Pearson correlation table showing the relationship between personal distress and job stress

Variable	X	df	r	P
Personal distress	48.56	158	2.28	<.05
Job stress	46.49			

$r (158) = 2.28, p < .05$

Authors' survey

The result in Table I shows a significant relationship between personal distress and job stress, thus confirming the first hypothesis.

Table II. Independent t - test table showing the difference in job - related tension reported by university workers and hospital workers

Variable	N	X	df	T	P
University workers	80	33.4	158	.079	>.05
Hospital workers	80	33.1			

$t (158) = .079, p > .05$

Authors' survey

Result as indicated in the table above shows that no significant difference exist in the job related tension of university and hospital workers. Hypothesis 2 is thereby rejected.

Table III. Independent t -test showing the difference in the level of job stress between female university workers and hospital workers

Variable	N	X	df	T	P
University workers	40	27.3	178	.0042	>.05
Hospital workers	40	26.9			

$t (78) = .0042, p > .05$

Authors' survey

Table III above revealed that no significant difference is found in the level of stress between university workers and their counterparts in the hospital setting

Table IV. Independent t -test showing the difference in the level of job stress between male and female workers

Variable	N	X	df	T	P
Male	80	30.6	78	3.158	<.05
Female	80	36.2			

$t (78) = 3.158; p < .05$

Authors' Survey

Result as shown in Table IV revealed that a significant difference exist in the job stress of male and female workers.

Discussion

This study focused on the influence of perceived job tension on stress reaction among university and hospital workers in Nigeria. From this study, it was found out that job stress is directly proportional to personal distress. This suggests that individuals react to job stressors differently because of the differences in their personality and coping style. This result corroborated the work of Masuda and Holmes (1976) who found that personality is one factor in the response to job stressors. They further stressed that only the anxious individual is most susceptible to the effect of stress. If a person has inadequate talent, inadequate training on the job, or lack of interest in the job, it will affect the level of job stress. It appears however that the single factor which is most likely to lead to job stress is a poor fit between the person and the job environment. This was revealed in the result of this study which shows no significant difference in the job related tension between hospital and university workers. This implies that it is not the type of job that causes job stress but many factors which could be personality factors, perception of stress, poor fit between the person and the job, among others. If the fit is poor, job stress is high. This also suggests that both hospital and university workers have equal chances of being exposed to job stress.

This study also tries to find out if the work environment that female found themselves

had any influence on their stress level. This was done by testing if there will be a significant difference in the level of stress between female hospital workers and female university workers, and the result shows no significant difference in their experience of stress. This suggests that most females have the same perception of work environment no matter the organization, and they react to stress in the same manner.

This study also found that there is a significant difference in the level of job stress between female and male university workers. This shows that female university workers are prone to job stress more than their male counterparts. Thus there is the tendency for the females to experience more symptoms of stress than males such as feeling depressed, having nightmares, feeling overwhelmed and experiencing stomach upset. Research conducted by Dohrenwend and Dohrenwend (1979) on sex difference in psychopathology showed that women had consistent high rate of neurosis while men had consistent high rate of personality disorders caused by stressors. Thus, women as spouses, mothers, care-givers and at the same time job holders are more susceptible to job stress. Sex difference can be attributed to responsibilities and cultural value of our society. The female is not given much prerogatives as male and this results in accumulating tension and not having a way of releasing it, therefore showing in the job performance.

Conclusion

The findings of this study revealed that job stress results from the interaction of individ-

ual and situational factors. Sex is not a role determinant of job stress, but it can be a significant factor. The work, the family, personal life and the support network of friends and co-workers has influence on reactions to stress and perception of job tension.

However, based on the findings of this study, it is recommended that management should ensure that the work load is in line with the worker's capabilities and abilities. Management should equally design jobs to provide meaning, stimulation, and opportunities for workers to use their skills. The management should clearly define workers' roles and responsibilities, give workers opportunities to participate in decisions and actions affecting their jobs, improve communication network with the workers, provide opportunities for social interaction among workers, and establish work schedules that are compatible with demands and responsibilities outside the job.

Furthermore, measures such as absenteeism, illness, turnover rates, and performance problems should be examined to gauge the presence and scope of job stress.

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