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Stress Management among Academics: An Insight for Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi - Nigeria

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ABSTRACT

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This paper explores stress and its management among academics with an insight for the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, Nigeria. Like many other higher public and private academic institutions, the Polytechnic has over the years silently lost a substantial number of its staff to stress, while some others have become temporarily and or permanently incapacitated, particularly the academics. This paper is a theoretical, secondary and qualitative study. The data were obtained from journals articles, conference papers and other public documents within and outside the Polytechnic. The literature also explored various fields related to organizations, employees and employers, psychology and education and found that stress result in death, permanent and temporary incapacitation of many academics some of which could be avoided by reduction and proper management of stress among the academics. The study made some specific in addition to the general recommendations in order to reduce and effectively manage stress among academics of the institution, including standardization the school Medical Centre and its services, consistent and sustained medical checkup on all Polytechnic employees, job redesigning, enforced proceeding on annual leave, an extra-ordinary means productivity award, extensive and intensive enlightenment and education on stress.



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Introduction

One of the age-long and major challenges confronting both employers and employees in most institutions/organizations all over the world, particularly the academic institutions and whether public or private, is the work/life balance, which among others, causes stress. Work-related stress is increasing in prevalence, with significant and negative consequences for employees, employers, output/productivity, the economy, and society as a whole (Cullinan et al., 2019). Stress evolves largely from multi-tasking, role overload, coping up with contradictory demands, and the need to balance priorities. What constitutes or results in stress in one individual, circumstance,

environment or organization may not to another. Similarly, stress is a personal experience to which all individuals respond, but relatively. There is no agreement on whether stress is in itself a disease or not. However, it is indisputable that when stress accumulates, it results in many and multi-dimensioned diseases which is why greater attention of organizational behavioralists, psychologists, employers, employees, and socio-psychological and health experts. That also prompts its study and review with much concern, especially that it is universal and relative to different organizations/institutions, individuals and circumstances. The Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi is one of the famous higher educational institutions in Nigeria. It is like the others, faced with the challenge of stress and how to manage it among its academics, being the population of this study

Background of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi - Nigeria

The Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi was established alongside six others on 25 July 1979 via Decree No. 33 of the then Federal Military regime of General Olusegun Obasanjo. That Decree was later amended with Decree No. 5 of 1 January 1993 by the regime of General Ibrahim Babangida. The Polytechnic is located in Gwallameji Village off Dass Road, in the capital city of Bauchi, Bauchi State. According to the establishment Decree, the main functions of the Polytechnic include: provision of both part and full time courses and training in management, applied sciences and technology as well as other fields for Nigeria's socio-economic, agricultural, industrial, research and technological development; arrange conferences and seminars on the various fields above; and carry out any other functions in promotion of the objectives for the establishment of the Polytechnic.

The Polytechnic has a Governing Council established via the same Decree No. 33. The Council is a corporate body and comprises of a Chairman and other Members appointed by the Federal Executive Council. The Polytechnic has six Schools and each of the Schools is headed by Dean Science and Technology, General Studies, Engineering Technology, Business Studies, Environmental Technology and Agricultural Engineering Technology. Under these Deans are thirty four academic Departments which are each also headed by a Head of Department. Apart from the six Deans, there is also the Dean, Students Affairs heading the Students Affairs. In all the Departments, courses are taught at levels of Diploma, National Diploma (ND), Higher National Diploma (HND), Post-Graduate Diploma and other affiliated Degree Programmes which are specifically handled by the Directorate of University Affiliations and Linkages (DUAL). The Polytechnic also has Directorates of Entrepreneurship Development, Research Development, SIWES, Procurement, Audit, Academic Planning, Works, Special Duties, Intellectual Property Protection and Transfer Office (IPPTO), and the Medical Centre. There are also the Public Relations and Physical Planning Units.

The Rector is the Chief Executive Officer of the institution. He is appointed for a single tenure of five years and assisted by a Deputy Rector. There is also the office of the Registrar for the Polytechnic and several Deputies Registrar (Establishment, Academics, SERVICOM/NODDAL, Students Affairs, Staff Development and Training, Public Relations, Guidance and Counselling, Exams and Record, and Admissions).

Materials and Methods

This study is theoretical and used secondary sources of available literature to collect the data used in the study. The secondary materials include books, journal articles and other public documents (Creswell, 2012). The materials were also drawn from many areas and fields with stake in academia, other organizations, stress and employer/employee relations – psychology, education, organizational behavior, financial experts and institutions, among others. It is also a qualitative/non-numerical in design (Leavy, 2017). This design enables researchers to freely

discuss problems at hand and provide open answers to such (Saris & Gallhofer, 2007). Qualitative research also enables the researcher to fully explore, investigate and focus on problem, relate it with others and deconstruction of collected data in order to make the audience have a deeper and clear understanding of the research problem and the results obtained (Bernard, 2006).

Conceptualization and Review of Related Literature

Stress is universal and relative, and is therefore, seen and defined relatively. Many therefore, see and or define stress from varying perspectives of understanding, environment, and circumstances. Stein and Flexner (1984) define stress as a tension and an anxiety. Health and Safety Executive (2001) defines stress as an individual's damaging response to excessive pressure and demands placed upon him or her. Some individuals appreciate and perform better under pressure (low stress), whilst others may underperform and incur health problems as a result of stress. Schuler (1979) describes stress as "a dynamic circumstance in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, limitation, or demand connected to what he or she wants and for which the perceived consequence is both unclear and significant." According to Moorhead and Griffin (2004), stress is a person's response to a stimulus/stressor that places him or her under excessive physical or mental pressure. Thus, according to Selye (1978), stress is an exogenous or inner desire to alter the life balance.

Occupational stress is defined as "the detrimental physical and emotional responses that arise when the demands of the job do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, or needs" (De Silva et al., 2017). As a result, stress is characterized by the experience of negative emotions, such as anger, tension, worry, frustration, and despair, as a result of occupational circumstances (Kyriacou & Sutcliffe, 1977). The definition of stress in the simplest terms is a frequent response to attack triggered by the disruption of the body's natural homeostasis (Haque & Aston, 2016; Haque et al., 2018).

Stress in the Academia

Studies have established significant linkages between stress and job satisfaction at tertiary education levels (Haque et al., 2019; Chaudhry, 2012). All over the world, including Nigeria, higher education institutions today face multidimensional changes and demands, which are not only challenging their conventional ways of operating, but also affect their mandates, authority, and organizational structures, and output and its quality (Doyle & Hind, 1998). Unlike in the past, higher educational institutions no longer enjoy stress-free working conditions and environment as both academic and non-academic staff are increasingly tied by the job, more job demands and increasingly challenging productivity from them with much pressure on their time, energy and commitment. These result in many negative effects, including stress and other poor socio-psychological, socio-physical, medical and health conditions, with the increasing rate at which employees collapse and or die suddenly (sudden death) or develop diseases (McCormick & Barnett, 2011). While these happen, employers increasingly demand more commitment and productivity from their employees in order to achieve optimum commitment and productivity and quality assurance (Haque & Oino, 2019; Wolniak, 2019). However, employees' commitment to organisations and their goals is largely affected by 'occupational stress' (Haque et al., 2019).

The education sector, particularly the tertiary institutions with the Polytechnics among others, is required to undertake greater challenges in fulfilling the global demands and expectations of the twenty-first century in intellectual research, technical and vocational innovations, which are indispensable to the increasing academic, markets and industry demands, and states competition for knowledge, resources and development as well as the sustenance of same by both governments and other non-state actors/Non-Governmental Organisations in both the short and long runs (Johari et al., 2018). The teacher, being the 'backbone' of every society that aims at building a healthy an

prosperous state and society has the great responsibility of not only imparting knowledge, but also noble and essential characters and values, particularly at the higher institutions for the purpose of producing resourceful, positive and industrious state and society. Teachers are, therefore, bestowed with the responsibility of not only designing, but also improving and or modifying a nation with proper future direction (Chaudhry, 2012; Ahmad, 2006). However, the teachers as well as the others working with them are increasingly engaged in more complex teaching, trainings, practicals, assessments and researches as well as administrative activities which altogether increase tension in the job and result in stress with consequent effects which are often negative (Child, 2004). This 'stress' negatively affects 'competence' and 'productivity' as well as the overall life of the teachers as shown by several researches for nearly four decades, especially where the working conditions are poor (Watts & Robertson, 2011).

Causes of Stress

Many employees across academia, other institutions organizations (public and private) suffer stress and the quality of employees' output/productivity is largely determined by absence of, high and or a low level of stress (George & Zakkariya, 2015; Mullins, 2007). While stress is relative to bio-environmental, working conditions, socio-psychological and geo-physical factors among others, it is universal. Therefore, the universal major causes of stress in organizations include:

- ✓ Increased competition/demand for increased productivity at low or poor operating costs
- ✓ Age of employee
- ✓ Excessive work load and increased/extended working hours for the employees
- ✓ Excessive and harsh rules and regulations, excessive bureaucratic red-tapism
- ✓ Poor communication, poor social and inter-personal relations, campus/office politics/academic and non-academic staff rivalry
- ✓ Lack of autonomy, poor delegation of power and responsibilities
- ✓ Poor or unclear division of responsibilities
- ✓ Poor communication and lack or absence of consultation
- ✓ Blame game
- ✓ Scapegoating
- ✓ Denial of impending problems
- ✓ Take home work

both problems or issues may be the reasons behind employees stress in organization (Haque et al., 2019). On another hand, a study by Kouvonen et al. (2008) shows that high rate of job stress is linked to higher intensity of smoking, just as Hassard et al. (2018) note that higher rates of alcohol consumption are linked to more stress-intensive roles. Stress is also largely associated with and related to long working hours, high levels of emotional demands, time pressure, bullying, harassment, violence, and discrimination in workplaces (Cullinan et al., 2019; Kivimaki et al., 2015; Russell et al., 2018). This submission is particularly emphatic to the population of this study. The population is characterized by longer working hours (excess work load), time pressure to meet up with lectures, marking of tests, assignments and examination scripts, conduct and assessment of practical, project supervision, conducting researches, development of conference papers and journals publications, among others. Others also have additional responsibilities of administrative duties such as Deanship, Headship of Departments and Units.

Effects of Stress on Academics/Employees and Organizations/Institutions

A study by Russell et al. (2018) shows that the proportion of employees experiencing job stress increases and has specifically more than doubled from 8% in 2010 to 17% in 2015. Public sector employees, including academics/teachers undergo higher rates of work-related stress than normal and that is usually accompanied by attending negative impacts on their physical health (Kawano, 2008; Quine, 2001; Einarsen et al., 1998). Factors resulting in stress are varied – the environment

and environmental factors, behaviors, among others and different types of psychological, behavioral and psychological difficulties are experienced by employees as a result of stress (Haque et al. 2018). Stress is arguably not a disease, but rather, the adverse reaction from individuals as a result of excessive pressure. It can however, accumulate and result in nervous breakdown, depression, heart related diseases, total collapse and sudden death. Stress adversely affects the employee's productivity and entire work life, family relations and bond. It has a significant influence and impact on physical, mental, social and environmental well-being. Stress results in not only tension, poor/low productivity (poor judgment, fatigue, bad/poor decisions), but also frustration, confusion, and unethical acts. For this, stress that happens at workplace (professional stress) and factors related to it are the behavior of boss, co-worker, attitude and the organization's environment (Nayak, 2008). Similarly, factors such as workload, emotional pressure, lack of support, and role ambiguity may cause fatigue and create negative attitudes towards one's job (Bakker et al., 2005). Unrelieved stress may result to diseases, accidents, damaged relationship between employers and employees and among the employees, early retirement based on medical grounds, high rate of sick and casual leave, premature death, higher turnover of employees, and inefficient/ineffective services delivery.

Consequences of occupational stress are observed at two levels, at the organization where the employee works, and at the level of the employee himself. There is a significant relationship between the levels of the institution/organization and the academic/employee and each significantly affects the other. Whether an institution/organization achieves its missions and attains its goals or not has significant effects on its employees (Mosadeghrad, 2014). According to Block (1977), stress destroys personal life activities and life imbalance may result in death, divorce or accident, especially where personal and other stresses such as professional, health conditions and problems increase or compound. Research on the harmful effects of occupational stress in relation to the employees' physical well-being also indicate that there occur more and at higher, level risks of cardiovascular and respiratory diseases, musculoskeletal and psychological disorders, psychological disorders and sleep disturbances, lack of concentration, depression, intolerance and anxiety, among others with occupational stress (O'Connor et al., 2000; Kang et al., 2005).

O'Connor et al. (2000) and O'Kane et al. (2000) conducted research on the negative effects of occupational stress on a worker's physical well-being and health, and found that among the most significant consequences are increased risks for cardiovascular diseases, musculoskeletal disorders, respiratory diseases, psychological disorders, sleep disturbances, lack of concentration, depression, intolerance, and many others, as well as anxiety.

Managing and Coping with Stress among Academics

Stressors vary from one institution/organization to another – factories, assembly plants, public/private organizations, the academia, health sector, among others. It is thus very important to identify which stressors are common and or peculiar to an organization before it can be properly manage and or reduced. There are three universally identified strategies for coping with stress as: problem solving, seeking social support, and avoidance (Amirkhan, 1990). However, stress for Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi can be also be generally reduced/managed through:

- ✓ Job clarity
- ✓ Design of stress management standards which may be unique for institution/organizations and age grades
- ✓ Provision of counselling and support services for academics/employees
- ✓ Educating the employees on stress, its impact and ways of management/reduction in work-life balance

- ✓ Effective communication between employers and the employees, and among the employees
- ✓ Provision of timely and meaningful support (which may relative to individuals and institutions/organization) to employees
- ✓ Engaging in friendly management style
- ✓ Discouragement of excessive work and or working for long hours
- ✓ Avoidance of harassments, discriminatory policies and programmes or preferential treatments among employees
- ✓ Phasing out all unnecessary works and prioritization of such works
- ✓ Ensure matching academics responsibilities and schedules with qualifications, experience and determination
- ✓ Where possible, schedules should be made flexible
- ✓ Engaging in Kabat-Zinn's popular Mindfulness-Based Stress Reduction (MBSR) training which comprise of: body scan (paying attention to what the body is feeling); sitting meditation (paying attention to breathing, sounds, thoughts, bodily sensations, feelings/ emotions); simple movement exercises such as walking or standing meditation, or lying yoga exercises (paying attention to what the body is feeling; exploring and accepting borders); informal meditation exercises such as paying full attention to daily activities (brushing one's teeth, taking a shower, eating, among others) (Kabat-Zinn, 1996; Kabat-Zinn et al., 1992; Kabat-Zinn, 1990).

Workload and Stress in the Academia

The relationship between stress and workload has also gained scholarly and professional attention. It refers to any actions directly or indirectly affecting employees' time spent executing professional obligations, responsibilities, and interests at work (Johari et al., 2018). Shukri (1998) defines workload as the responsibilities given to teachers in or out of the classroom, whereas Azita (2012) defines workload as the amount of time spent by teachers performing various tasks related to their official duties as a teacher, such as teaching and learning, co-curricular activities, meetings, etc., during or after school hours. It is thus viewed as the amount of time required by instructors to complete their official responsibilities during or outside of school hours. In order to be more efficient and productive in their job, academics must not only spend time in the classroom, but also spend additional hours after work (Sharifah et al., 2014; Punia & Kamboj, 2013). In the same manner as increased academic workload, the ratio of teachers to students increases (Easthope & Easthope, 2000). Hassam et al. (2011) report that lengthy working hours due to excessive workload may have a negative effect on job satisfaction as this circumstance interferes with an individual's health at work and at home, including the risk of coronary heart disease and stroke (Kivimaki et al., 2015).

Work-Life Balance, Workplace Changes and Stress in Academia

Work-life balance entails "striving for a balance between job and life and feeling at ease with both work and other family obligations" (Daipuria & Kakar, 2013). Consequently, work-life balance, which Abendroth and Dulk (2011) also view as the harmonious interface between the various domains of life, is vital to the quality of work, workload carriage, socio-psychological well-being of the academic staff, as well as the quality of students produced and their overall contribution/impact on society.

The pressure on employees in most organizations has increased as a result of demographic and workplace changes such as an increase in the proportion of women in the workforce, an ageing population, a shortage of skilled workers, an escalating degree of globalization, and intensifying market and labor competition (Beauregard & Henry, 2009). These consistently lead to a rise in a variety of other factors, such as mental and psychological health issues associated with stress or

depression, and increased absenteeism (American Psychological Association, 2015; DeLongis, et al., 1988; Richardson & Rothstein, 2008; Halpern, 2005).

According to Hertel et al. (2013), ageing refers to changes that occur in biological, psychological, and social functioning through time, consequently influencing individuals on the individual, organizational, and societal levels. In this environment, elder employees are less stressed than their younger counterparts. On the other hand, it is emphasized that the impact of stressful employment varies with time or life stage. As a result, older employees or individuals may be more susceptible to occupational stress, as the ageing process is accompanied by changes in coping capacities and resources, as well as physiological system changes. Therefore, older employees may be more susceptible to being ill as a result of stressful work and may require a longer duration to recover from illness. In this instance, the link between stress and sick leave would be stronger among and for older employees (Gotz et al., 2018). Similarly, employees who are unable to cope with stressful events and conditions may experience unfavorable socio-physical, socio-psychological, and/or behavioral impacts. Physical, employees experience head, neck and shoulder pains, as well as or 'elevated heart rate'. Psychologically, employees negatively experience include insomnia, anxiety, depression among others. Behaviorally, there are fatigue, less effectiveness and efficiency, among others. These, altogether, negatively influence the entire performance/productivity, output of an organization (Hespanhol, 2004).

Conclusion and Summary

Stress management is a key factor to physical, mental and social well-being of academics in any institution, including the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi. Inability or poor management of stress negatively affects both individuals and institutions. Stress is a personal experience among the academics, including those of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, and varies with personality. It is also determined by nature of the job of the academics, and commensurate with the type of organization (public and educational). Each individual academic has his/her particular response to it and ability to cope with or manage it (Mullins, 2007). Not all stress, particularly an amount of it that is not much can be said to be negative or bad on the academics of the Polytechnic. Stress may, among others, be good in increasing performance and productivity of the academics. While pressure to work may improve performance, achieve proper harnessing of opportunities and positive response to challenges, stress is that continuous and extreme pressure or demands while the individual is unable to cope with such. Causes of stress among academics can be personal, social among others, and it is hard to completely do away with stress. Its proper management among Polytechnic academics is however, imperative upon the employer (Polytechnic) and the employees (academics) in order to achieve the organizational goals and at the same time ensure safety, good health and socio-psychological and environmental well-being of the employees.

Stress has been a major concern to all academics, whether public or private institutions. In the public sector, higher educational institutions are among those on top in the list of those with higher levels of cases of and risks associated with stress. Such institutions have over the years lose a substantial number of workforce which causes adverse effects on the output and quality of services they deliver, and impacted negatively on the other employees, their work-life balance – social relations, families and friends, leisure, economic well-being and life-span among others. The Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi is one of the best and leading Federal Polytechnics in Nigeria largely due to Management's determination to deliver the best and qualitative services to the public in addition to other unique services it renders such as full audit of each and every semester results and scripts. Hence, because of the nature of the services delivered and the determination to deliver the best and excel, many academics of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi – Nigeria, have over the years suddenly collapsed, died or lost the control of their medical and health status and situations. These have been the results of among others work pressure, failure to balance work-life, much

commitment to work without balanced rest, efforts to meet up with deadlines, among others which are altogether tied to stress. While this occurs, many of the experienced employees such as Chief Lecturers, Technologists are not only ageing, but retiring thereby leaving a gap which can hardly be filled. In spite of the extended retirement age of 65 to the academics, shortage of experienced Lecturers and Technologists, for example, threaten the attainment of the institution's main objectives.

Many of the retired also face varying types and degrees of medical and health challenges largely due to excessive loads they had carried earlier in the course of their working career. Although it would be hard to away with stress, the Management of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi can do a lot to reduce and or manage the extent to which stress negatively affects its employees, particularly the academics. It may not also be done within a short period of time, but careful and meticulous implementation of both general and some other specific recommendations based on the universality of stress and the peculiarities of Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi can go a long way in proper management or reduction of stress among its employees. This will in the end, optimize not only productivity, but the quality of academic and other services discharged by the Polytechnic.

Recommendations

From this study, it is pertinent that unnecessary and or excessive stress cause major harm to the body and healthcare, socio-psychological, family and distant relations of employees. It also harms the organization, environment and many other related systems. In view of the practical and negative effects of stress on employees, particularly the academics of the Federal Polytechnic, Bauchi, this study recommends to the Polytechnic Management and the employees that: the Polytechnic Medical Centre should be standardised with modern, sophisticated and adequate medical and health facilities, equipment and consultation services for optimal, effective and efficient healthcare services delivery; sports equipment and other recreational facilities should be provided or rehabilitated in the Polytechnic; there should be extensive and intensive enlightenment and educational programmes to all the Polytechnic employees on stress, its effects and management and general healthcare; Annual Leave and the rights of every employee to go for it and the socio-psychological and medical importance of undertaking the Annual Leave; there should be comprehensive and rotating policy on annual leave so that all employees can be allowed to go such leave within the year no matter their schedules; the Establishment Unit should devise appropriate means and modalities of deploying and redeployment of staff to the relevant Departments and Units for effective service delivery and sound healthcare/working conditions; employees, especially the Academics should only be allowed to handle tasks they are competent to and be given relatively balanced time and tasks schedules, including load/rank ratio; excess workload should where possible be avoided and where imperative, it should be shaded such that some employees will not be overloaded over others; Establishment Unit should identify Departments/Units with more employees but less work with a view to redeploying them to other Departments/Units in need of more human resource/manpower; students should be made to comply with all laid down rules and regulations governing admission, lectures, examination so as to reduce the extent to which problems arise as a result of non-compliance with established rules; academic calendar should be made to reflect the realities of Nigerian situation, rather than always banking on an ideal situations; Heads of Departments and Units should always have good and warm relations with their subordinates and other colleagues so as to be fully aware of their conditions (socio-psychological, economic, medical and health, among others), and to take appropriate actions and measures where and when necessary; Management should encourage the establishment of varying Welfare Schemes, Cooperative Societies and services which cover and render extra and supportive financial services, facilities on housing, transportation, essential commodities, access to medical and health services, among others; flow of information on job specifications, extant rules, conditions of service, requirements for promotion, issues of discipline

should also be made simple and clearly spelt out to ensure effective communication and avoidance of or reduction of unnecessary misunderstanding, conflicts and wrangling within the Polytechnic.

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