

## OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AMONGST ACADEMIC STAFF: EFFECT ON SERVICE DELIVERY (A CASE OF AUCHI POLYTECHNIC, AUCHI)

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### ABSTRACT

*In this study, an attempt is made to examine the relationship between occupational stress among academic staff and the quality of service delivery. The study involves a sample on 150 academic staff (lecturers) out of the 449 lecturers currently in services of Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi as at 31<sup>st</sup>, March, 2011 through the judgemental sampling technique. A 15-item questionnaire constructed by the researchers, validated by three experts and which as an internal consistency coefficient of 28 percent served as the instrument of data collection. This study is empirically established, using the chi-square ( $X^2$ ) at 5% level of significance. The implication of this study is that quality of output of lecturers in Auchi Polytechnic Auchi is affected by their workload. Consequently, the research suggests manageable carrying capacity, less administrative responsibilities on lecturers by management e.t.c.*

**Keywords:** *occupational stress, auchi polytechnic, services delivery, academic staff.*

### INTRODUCTION

In today's organizations stress has become an epidemic. Thus upsurge can be attribute to a lot of reasons from global economic crisis and its attended high rate of inflation to be demanded in the workplace.

Stress is unavoidable but critical to the working condition and life style of individuals. In addition, it is sometimes required to create challenges and pressures for work to have sparkle. The nature of work is changing at whirlwind speed. Perhaps now than ever before job stress poses a threat to the health of staff (workers). There are natural variations that prepare a person to cope with stressors, which upset environmental conditions, by either confronting or avoiding them. It is very rare to escape pressure that brings about stress at work.

Occupation stress arises when worker perceive that they cannot adequately cope with the demand made on them or with threats with their jobs and the circumstances in which they were carried out. The main factors which cause stress at work are lack of security, excessive workload, harsh supervision and discipline, lack of control over work organization. And inadequate training and career prospects.

Stress has been a prevalent and very costly problem in the workplace. In the academic environment stress has greatly ravaged human services and has also eaten deep into the fabric of effective service delivery. This has resulted in poor service delivery occasioned by poor health, absence from duty, inadequate assessment criteria, etc with its toll on teaching and learning.

The public outcry for effective service delivery amongst lecturers in tertiary institutions despite the occupational stress do faced in the academic environment by teaching staff has necessitated for this study. However, the objective of this paper is to critically assess the occupational stress amongst academic staff and the quality of service delivery in Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi, Edo State. Stress in the workplace is a growing problem, with extensive costs to individual's organizations and society. A national survey conduct in the USA indicated that the proportion of workers who reported feeling highly stressed has more than doubled between 1985 and 1990. A national survey conducted in 1993 by the Britain government reveals that almost one-third of respondents reported significant levels of stress as a result of their work and more than half felt that their level of stress had increased over the last five years.

To some degree stress is an unavoidable characteristic of life and work and as such is neither inherently bad nor necessarily destructive. There is, however, a clear difference between being under pressure at work and being subjected to the kind of chronic stress that is potentially damaging to physical and psychological well-being. Occupational stress is now considered to be amongst the top five work-related health problems in the world.

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

Research done worldwide indicates that academic staff's stress is becoming endemic (Vanwyk, 1998).

Stress is considered to be the main factor contributing towards job dissatisfaction job-related illness and early retirement in England (Van Dick, Philips, Marburg & Wanger, 2001). The dominant representation of teaching has become that of a high stressful occupation (Jarvis, 2002). The increasing recognition received by academic staff stress over recent years (Boyle, Borg, Flazon & Baglioni, 1995; Byrne, 1994) is an indication of the difficulties encountered by academic staff. Research by Maxwell in Paulse (2005) reveals that stress has become widespread amongst academic staff, and studies carried out in Victoria, Australia, over the last twenty years provide insight into the extent of the problem.

Paulse (2005) states that during the 1980's 160 academic staff between the ages 50-55, were each year superannuated on the grounds of ill-health. One half to two thirds were retired early due to psychological ill-health, whilst a further one-tenth retired due to stress related cardiovascular disorders (Otto, 1986).

A large scale investigation into attitudes to work conducted by the Guardian in 1996, concluded that academic staff were considerably more demoralized than members of the 20 other occupational groups investigated. Academics indicated that they felt less valued by their employers and reported lower levels of satisfaction and job security than other groups. Over 50 percent of the academic staff surveyed reported that their jobs stressed them all or most of the time. Unsatisfactory management practices were cited as the most significant causes of work-related stress. 58 percent of respondents from academic background blamed management for their stress. One in five admitted that they through about leaving academic on a daily basis; an additional 20 percent indicated that they had similar though about once a week. Lower levels of psychological well-being than norm were also evidence one-third of academics surveyed reported having fact depressed or very unhappy over the previous two weeks. A diary survey was conducted by the association of University Teachers (AUT) in 1994 to investigate workload and the use of time by full-time academic staff.

The results of this survey indicated that the workload of academic staff is both heavy and increasing. Employees from all sectors of the work force reported regularly working far in excess of a 35-hour week. For academics, the average length of the working week during semester time was almost 55 hours decreasing to 51 hours during the student vacation period, with approximately 40 percent of work done during evenings and weekends. Academic staff related that the most significant overall element of their work load was administration, as opposed to teaching supervision or personal research (McEwan & Thompson, 1997). Stress in Nigerian educational system is multi-dimensional and is in a transitional stage. The lack of discipline in schools, Abolition of Corporal punishment, unmotivated learners, redeployment, retrenchments and retirement packages, for lecturers, problem of carrying capacity, change in curriculum approach, employment process into academics, and the plight of students all contribute to raising the stress level of lecturers (Lawani, 2007). Other challenges are in the area of the new policy formulation, outcome-based education, the management style of governing bodies for tertiary institutions, the alarming rate of crime in the country's current political changes, social unrest and the level of corruption, create stress for academic staff.

#### **RESEARCH QUESTIONS**

1. To what extent does stress by position affect academic staff job performance?
2. Is there a significant relationship between stress by age distribution and the quality of services(s) render by academic staff?
3. To what extent dues stress by carrying capacity/stress by workload predict the job performance of lecturers.

#### **RESEARCH HYPOTHESIS**

The research hypothesis tested was: there is a positive relationship between the stress level of academic staff and the quality of services(s) delivery.

**LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY:**

The main limitation of this study is that the study is restricted to Auchi polytechnic, Auchi, the result may not be too correct as this may not represent the reality of what is obtainable in most of the higher institutions in Nigeria if generalized.

**Research Questions 1**

1. To what extent does stress by position affect academic staff job performance?

**Table I:**

Relationship between stress by position and academic staff services delivery

Source of Variation	Sum Squares	DF	Means Squares	DF Ratio
Position	4.52	8	0.57	0.47
Stress level	29.63	29	14.87	3.83
Residual	62.15	16	3.88	
	93.30	43		

Finding from the above revealed a significant outcome. The  $F_{cal} < F_{tab}$  thus, means that position held by academic staff do increase their level of stress.

**Research Question 2**

Is there a significant relationship between stress by age distribution and the quality of services(s) render by academic staff?

**Table II:**

Relationship between stress by age distribution and the quality of service(s) render by academic staff

Age distribution	Means ( $\bar{x}$ )	Variance	STD	$Cv = \frac{Std \times 100}{\bar{x}}$
Below 25	7.33	53.04	7.28	99.32
26-35	7.67	40.34	6.35	82.74
36-45	8.00	37.00	6.08	76.00
46-55	10.00	19.00	4.36	43.60
56-65	3.67	11.34	1.16	31.61

Finding from tables 2 above, revealed that the average level of stress is very high among the ages of 46-55 years, but very, low as the age progresses. Age of 46-55 i.e. staff within the ages of 46-55 years are vulnerable. While the consistency of stress among staff is found to be 31.61 meaning that the stress level is very consistent with academic staff between 56-65 years of age but in-consistent from the ages less than 25 years.

**Research Question 3:**

To what extent does stress by carrying capacity/stress by workload predict the job performance of lecturer?

**Table III:**

Relationships between stress by carrying capacity/ hour work and lecturers job performance ( $\chi^2$ -Chi-square analysis).

	Value	DF	Sig
Reason chi-square	1.096	4	0.895
Likelihood ratio	1.107	4	0.893
Linear-by-linear association	1.020	1	0.313
No of valid cases	115		

Findings from table 3: there is significant relationship between the level of stress of academic staff and the number of students they teach/ the numbers they engage in teaching.

**Table IV:** Mean rating of the extent of stress on the working abilities of academic staff.

s/no	Questionnaire item	Mean rating	Standard deviation	Remark	Rank
1	My family suffers from the effects of my jobs	3.33	0.92	Significant	1 <sup>st</sup>
2	My annual appraisal process has fairly recognized my achievements and abilities	2.93	1.00	Significant	5.5 <sup>th</sup>
3.	There is provision for stress management training sponsored by the institution	1.80	0.01	Insignificant	
4.	Lack of ample time make me not to effectively deal with students problems and queries	2.83	1.10	Significant	9 <sup>th</sup>
5.	In my place of work I normally experience depression & dissatisfaction working condition	2.16	1.10	Insignificant	
6.	My social life suffers because of the demands of my job	3.06	0.93	Significant	4 <sup>th</sup>
7.	Excess carrying capacity of students affects the quality of my job	3.26	0.85	Significant	2 <sup>nd</sup>
8.	My input at work is being influence by the depressing working conditions	2.20	0.98	Insignificant	
9.	My involvement in administrative responsibilities alongside my academic duties have affected the quality of my services delivery	2.90	0.91	Significant	7 <sup>th</sup>
10.	My workload is manageable	2.86	1.02	Significant	8 <sup>th</sup>
11.	Lack of time forces me to compromise my quality of work	2.06	0.10	Insignificant	
12.	I am unhappy with the level of support I obtain from my colleagues and students prepare for my classes	1.80	0.91	Insignificant	
14.	I have ample opportunity and support to undertake scholarly work and research	1.80	0.91	Insignificant	
15.	My personal priorities are compromised	2.93	1.00	Significant	5 <sup>th</sup>

Table iv: Above shows the degree of stress level the most significant stress, their rank order includes items 1,7,13,6,2,15,9,10,4 with item mean rating 3.33,3.32,3.20,3.06,2.93,2.93,,2.90, and 2.83 respectively. While other items are considered least significant since their mean ratings are less than 2.50

**Table V: data for testing hypothesis**

Items	Strongly agree	Agree	Disagree	Strongly disagree	total
4	65	31	12	07	115
7	46	31	23	15	115
8	38	38	23	16	115
9	61	38	12	04	115
11	46	38	23	08	115
14	30	40	30	15	115
Total	286	216	123	65	690

Sources: Researchers Computation

From the  $X^2$  table, the critical value at 5% level of significance is 24.996 and the calculated value  $X^2$  is 45.240 since the calculated value is not within the acceptance region, the hypothesis stated is accepted the

evidence supports the hypothesis that there is positive relationship between the extent of stress faced by academic staff and the quality of service they deliver.

The positive relationship between stress level and quality of services delivery by academic staff was as expected by literature (Van Wyk, 1998, Van Dick, Philips, Marbing and Wargwer 2000; Jarvis 2002; Woods 1999)

## **MATERIALS AND METHODS**

The survey research design was adopted in this study. The survey method was adopted since the variables under investigation cannot be manipulated by the researcher and it is capable to produce data relevant for testing the hypothesis. A seven (7) item questionnaire was the major instrument for data collection. The structural questionnaire was developed along a modified 4-point scale Likert type of: strongly agree (SA), agree (A) disagree (D) and strongly disagree (S). Respondents were required to indicate the extent to which agree or disagree with each of the items. Data were analyzed using descriptive statistics (i.e mean and standards deviation the chi-square tool for testing the hypothesis. The questionnaire items were weighted 4,3,2 and 1 point(s) respectively for the strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree scales. Positively stated items were scored in that order and negatively stated items in the reverse order. Any mean rating which is 2.5 and above is considered insignificant the research population comprises the entire lecturers in Auchi Polytechnic, Auchi which stood at 449 as at 3<sup>rd</sup> March, 2011. A sample of the research population was taken using the judgemental sampling technique. This method was chosen since the researchers want to study a small subset of a larger population and members of the subset are easily identified. 150 lecturers were used as sample size drawn from the various departments in the polytechnic. For the purpose of this research 150 questionnaires were administered personally to the respondents of which 115 were returned. A response rate of at least 30% is considered acceptable for most research purpose (Sekeran 2003).

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

On the basis of the findings derived from the study the researchers recommends that;

1. The management of tertiary institutions should always set a better time management and realistic self assessment of stress should be imbibed and carefully monitored.
2. The provision of recreational centres and encouraging a sustaining friendly atmosphere among colleagues.
3. The number of student being admitted into institutions should be that which is manageable to facilitate effective lecture deliveries by lecturers
4. Academic staff currently engaged in administrative position should be encouraged to spend lesser time in teaching i.e a course should be allocated to such staff besides they should always delegate responsibilities to other academic staff.
5. Management in collaboration with academic staff union should institute stress management programmes at regular intervals to ensure the stress is managed proactively at institutions of higher learning.
6. As a matter of urgency, there should be effort to address mental health problems of academic staff through training assessment of individual stress related problems and introduction of medical aid schemes through an incentive and reward programme.

## **CONCLUSION**

Stress is a social ill that is capable of creating inefficiency and poor output performance in the academic environment. Stress in teaching is a well-recognized phenomenon as the professions have been indicated as a stressful one by previous research. The study indicates that a substantial number of academic staff working in tertiary institutions are experiencing a high degree of pressure at work from various sources and that the impact of the changing nature of their work has led to work overload, long working hours, job insecurity and a range of other problems causing stress.

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