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Predictors of Stress and Coping Mechanisms among Lecturers of Tertiary Institutions in Abuja, Nigeria

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Abstract

Objective: This sort to determine the predictors of stress and the coping mechanism practiced among lecturers of tertiary institutions in Abuja, Nigeria.

Methodology: The study employed a cross-sectional survey design and it adopted the simple balloting and purposive sampling. A 33-item semi-structured questionnaire was validated at Cronbach alpha 0.82. Data collected were analyzed using IBM SPSS version 23 to compute descriptive and inferential statistics which were statistically tested at a 5% level of significance.

Results: Mean age of respondents was 36±0.9, 120 (32%). The level of knowledge on stress among respondents was below average 157 (42.0%). The respondent's attitude revealed that majority had negative attitudinal disposition to stress 231 (61.8%). Lecturers' environmental reinforcing factor was recorded as 246 (65.8%). Enabling factors that enhance teaching were identified to be insufficient within the tertiary institutions was recorded 249 (66.6%) and the stress coping mechanism was above average performance 234 (62.6%). There is significant relationship between Attitudinal disposition of respondents towards stress coping mechanism p=0.000, R=0.317 and Enabling factors that promote stress and stress coping mechanism p=0.000, R=0.103. There is sufficient statistical evidence to conclude that enabling factors was the most predicting variable among the two independent variables. r^2=0.103, p=0.000.

Conclusion: Training and seminars to address the personal predisposing factors can enhance better coping mechanism and increase knowledge on stress. An adjustment to enabling factors can reinforce the delivery of service.

Keywords: *Stress, Lecturers, Predictors, Coping mechanism, Tertiary institutions.*

Introduction

The concept of lecturing is a "teaching-learning" process which was traditionally lecturing regarded as a low stress occupation. When compared to professions in other sectors, it does not necessarily come with a high remuneration but for its flexibility, light workloads and the opportunity to develop one's own choice of research [1, 2]. Globally, 75% of adults reported experiencing moderate to high levels of stress in the past month and nearly half reported that their stress has increased [3]. Stress is described as a sense of being overwhelmed, worry, destruction, press, exhaustion, and lethargy. Therefore, stress can influence people in every age, sex, race, and situation and can result in both physical and psychological health [4].

Stressors experienced by university academics in Nigeria include; home and work balance, role obscurity, optimal performance [5], academic workload, student issues and role clash [6], strike interference with academia activities, irregular salary, inadequate instructional facilities [7], work load conflict, demands from colleagues and institutional board members, inadequate resources to carry out given task, grueling promotion criteria and procedures [8]. Stress coping mechanisms deals with techniques designed to maintain the stress level with its normal range [9]. Stress coping mechanisms techniques are relaxation, sleeping, physical activities, exercise, healthy eating, meditation, laughter, social support and cognitive restructuring. These activities help to maintain the stress level of the human system, since it's been established that stress occurs as a

relationship between human and his environment. Some of the unhealthy ways of coping with stress which include: smoking, drinking too much, over-eating or under-eating, chewing gums, and taking out your stress on others. A university academic by virtue of his training and disposition, should be an embodiment of academic excellence, exhibiting some skills and competencies, which he is expected to impart to his students. For greater effectiveness in the discharge of his duties as an academic, the lecturer needs to be aware of the various signs and symptoms of stress and also some strategies to manage his stress adequately [10].

Stress has been identified as an integral part of lecturing job, it is associated with important deadlines to meet and little time to accomplish task [11]. This situation is arising from diverse factors; the pressure for improved graduate output from the public, the pressure to generate knowledge through research that will give the nation a competitive advantage in the global market, increased workload emanating from teaching and administrative responsibilities, not so suitable work environment, family expectations and the pressure to grow on the job [12].

Studies have shown evidence to prove that tertiary institutions in Nigeria (whether private or government) is stress resistant [13]. The official aim of the annual NUC accreditation assessment is to ensure that universities comply with the commission's standard as contained in its 1995-99 report, which recommended a student-to-lecturer ratio of 9:1 for agriculture and engineering-technology faculties, 6:1 in human and veterinary medicine faculties and 10:1 in science and pharmacy faculties, while law, social sciences and arts should be 20:1 [14]. Some of the challenges faced by lecturers in the Nigerian Educational system are lack of technology which impedes their ease of assignment and delivery, demand and supply of the university education, large number of students in lecture halls especially in the Federal and State Universities and increase in school fees versus the quality of education dished out due to lack of motivation or incentives to encourage lecturers in their delivery of knowledge [15]. The study seeks to investigate the predictors of stress and stress coping mechanism practice among lecturers of tertiary institutions using the PRECEED model. Therefore, the study proposes the following hypotheses:

- There is a significant relationship between knowledge on stress and stress coping mechanism among lecturers of tertiary institutions in Abuja
- There is a significant relationship between attitude to stress and stress coping mechanism among lecturers of tertiary institutions in Abuja
- There is a significant relationship between reinforcing environmental factors to stress and stress coping mechanism among lecturers of tertiary institutions in Abuja
- There is a significant relationship between enabling factors that promote or discourage stress and stress coping mechanism among lecturers of tertiary institutions in Abuja

Materials and Methods

Study population, Population and Location

The study will adopt a cross-sectional design that made use of a qualitative method of data collection from February to March 2020. A 33-item semi-structured questionnaire with reliability 0.82 was used to collect data from three hundred and seventy-four (374) participants. The population for this study was made up of lecturers from 4 tertiary institutions in Abuja, obtained by simple balloting with an estimated population of less than 3000 lecturers.

This study adopted the simple balloting and purposive sampling. The simple balloting was done by classifying the tertiary institutions into Federal University, Private University, Polytechnic and College of Education. Balloting was done to obtain 1 Federal University, 1 Private University, 1 Polytechnic and 1 College of Education from each group. Questionnaires were self-administered to lecturers by researcher and research assistants who were properly trained to collect data from participants from various tertiary institutions in Abuja.

Instrument for the Study

The semi-structured 33-item questionnaire was developed in the following sections:

Section A addressed Socio-demographic characteristics of respondents such as age, ethnicity, marital status, educational qualification and working experience. Section B

assessed the Personal Predisposing factors which were divided into knowledge and attitude. Section C identified Enabling factors that promote or discourage stress such as policies, infrastructure, salaries and incentives. Section D assessed Reinforcing environmental factors such as media and social support. Section E examined the Stress coping mechanisms practice carried out by participants. The PRECEED model was considered as a theoretical framework during the development of the questionnaire for this study.

Measures of Variable

The socio-demographic characteristics of participants was determined using 5-items having options to be chosen. The first item which will have 4 options, second item will have 4 options, the third item will have 4 options, the fourth item will have 4 options and the fifth item will have 4 options.

The Personal Predisposing factors in section B assessed personal factors which ware divided into; B1: Knowledge about stress, consisting of 8 questions on 8-point reference scale having *Yes or No* options for Knowledge. Scoring for the correct answers will range from 0-1 for each question in this section. B2: Attitudinal disposition to stress, consisting of 5 questions on a 15-point reference on a Likert scale having *Strongly Agree, Agree, Disagree and Strongly Disagree* options for Attitudinal Disposition. Scoring for the correct answers will range from 0-3 for each question in this section.

In Section C, enabling factors that promote or discourage stress were identified. Consisting of 5 items having a 15-point reference Likert scale ranging from agree, *strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree*. Scoring for the correct answers will range from 0-3 for each question in this section.

In section D the Reinforcing environmental factors to stress were assessed. It consisted of 5 items with a 15-point rating Likert scale ranging from strongly agree to *agree, strongly agree, disagree and strongly disagree*. Scoring for the correct answers will range from 0-3 for each question in this section.

The stress coping mechanism practice was examined in section E, consisting of 5 items on a 15-point reference Likert scale having *Not at all, Rarely, Occasionally and Very often*. Scoring for the correct answers will range from 0-3 for each question in this section.

Data Analysis

The data obtained would be coded, analyzed and interpreted using descriptive statistics and statistical package for Social Science (SPSS) version 23.0. Variables would be computed and scores will be allocated according to the rating scale for each variable. Summaries of descriptive statistics such as means, standard error of the mean and standard deviation will be derived. Also, correlation and regression will also be used to determine the relationships between variables of different sections in the instrument Data will be represented using tables, figures and charts for lucidity and linear regression analysis will also be used to know the highest predictor of contraceptive services to adolescents. P-value of < 0.05 will be considered statistically significant.

Ethical consideration

Ethical clearance was obtained from the Babcock University Health Research Ethics Committee (BUHREC) to conduct the study to protect the participant's rights. Informed consent was be given through verbal communication and written consent that was signed.

Results

Soci-demograpic characteristics

Majority of the respondents were between the ages of 31-40years (32.1%) with a mean age of the population being ±36 years. Large population of the respondents have at least a Master's Degree in their various fields of study with 31% of the population having less than 5 years working experience (Table 1).

Personal predisposing factor to stress

The level of knowledge among respondents was measure on 8-point rating scale with mean score 4.2±1.4 (Table 2). Respondent's knowledge about stress was below average 217 (58%) as compared to those who had a good knowledge about stress 157 (42.0%). Awareness carried out deals more on the impact of stress without outlining the forms in which stress occurs and the fact that stress occurs through all forms of life even in children and it is not age dependent (Table 3).

Attitude was measured on 15-points rating scale and the mean score was 8.1±2.5 (Table 2) valid for 374 respondents (n=374). The

attitudinal disposition of respondent's to stress was negative with 231 (61.8%) while 143 (38.2%) had a positive response to stress clearly understanding that stress leads to other diseases and it is not age dependent. The level of attitudinal disposition is not acceptable for the respondents as this is unfavorable attitude towards the stress coping mechanism practices. The level of attitude was rated just at average score for all the respondents (Table 4).

Level of reinforcing environmental factors to stress among respondents

Reinforcing environmental factors were measured on 15-points rating scale and the mean score was 8.3±2.22 (Table 2). As regards social support offered by significant others, friends and colleagues to lecturers it proved to be adequate 246 (65.8%) in coping with stress compared to the inadequate 128 (34.2%) statistics obtained. This also indicates average score for all respondents. Majority of the respondents lack environmental support factors to practice adequately stress coping mechanism. More than half had a score below average for reinforcing factors (Table 5).

Level of enabling factors that determines stress among respondents

Enabling factors was measured on 15-points rating scale and the mean score for all respondents was 8.7±2.6 (Table 2) valid for 374 respondents (n=374). The respondent's statistics shows that there are insufficient facilities 249 (66.6%) as compared to the report of sufficient facilities 125 (33.4%). The mean score was a bit above average but not appropriate to ensure good stress coping mechanism practices among the respondents. Respondents need more enabling environment, good motivation and reinforcement to ensure proper engagement in good stress coping mechanism (Table 6).

Stress coping mechanism practiced among the respondents

The favorable stress coping mechanism health behavior was measured on 15points rating scale and the mean score was computed to be 8.6±2.9 (Table 2). Stress coping practice of the respondents was above average 234 (62.6%) as compared to the responses below average 140 (37.4%). The mean score for behavior was unacceptable as the score for all respondents is an average score. The implication is that, majority of respondents don't engage in proper stress coping mechanism behavior (Table 7).

The research hypotheses for this study proposed an association between the two independent variables and the dependent variable. When tested at 5% level of significance, the study revealed a significant relationship attitudinal disposition of respondents towards stress and their stress coping mechanism practices p=0.000, R=0.317. Also, there is a significant relationship between enabling factors that promote stress and stress coping mechanism practices p=0.000, R=0.103.

Discussion

The findings of this study revealed that the respondent's level of knowledge on stress is below average 217 (58%) as compared to those who had a good knowledge about stress 157 (42.0%). This shows that they are aware about the impact of stress such as anxiety, tiredness, depression, cardiovascular diseases, diabetics and other stress related ailments but are not knowledgeable about the concept of stress as a disease and its classification. The attitudinal disposition of respondent's to stress was negative with 231 (61.8%) while 143 (38.2%) had a positive response to stress clearly understanding that stress leads to other diseases and it is not age dependent. When it comes to attitude, stress can affect the level productivity and the capacity of the lecturer to fully impact knowledge to students because lecturing is not only cognitive but also affective [16].

Social support offered by significant others, media and colleagues to lecturers proved to be adequate 246 (65.8%) and there was no significant relationship between reinforcing environmental factors and stress coping mechanism practice (p=0.171, R=0.071). Study carried out Philadelphia showed that, the marital status of lecturers in stable relationships with their partners is believed to have a positive effect on their emotional well-being compared to that of their counterparts that are unmarried or divorced. The separated and divorced individuals tend to confront a disproportionate number of chronic problems and hence report higher stress, which contributes to the differences in mental health by marital status [17]. The findings of this study are in contrast to the qualitative research carried out in Indonesia [18]

which revealed that social support from family members was less due to family-work interference.

Enabling factors identifies circumstances, infrastructure and facilities that should be available in a healthy learning environment. The respondent's statistics shows that there are insufficient facilities 249 (66.6%) as compared to the report of sufficient facilities 125 (33.4%). This report corresponds with studies carried out in Nigeria and Kenya stated that most tertiary institutions were not conducive to in work due to poor facilities, dilapidated structures and unavailability of equipment to enhance learning [19, 20, 21].

Certain policies enforced by university authorities are not favorable to lecturers to carry out their jobs such as increased work hours, insufficient number of academic staff, extra responsibility attached to lecturing, increase in class population [21, 22]. Recommendations by authors stated that an increase in salary and stability in payment will aid the compensation of lecturers as compared to their counterparts in other continents across the globe. Also, the government needs to improve the funding mechanism to give vice-chancellors the opportunity to replace lecturers and match the acceptable student-lecturer ratio especially in government owned tertiary institutions that have a higher population of students [15, 20, 23].

Cross-sectional studies carried in Akwa Ibom and Cross River state, shows that stress related factors like workload, facilities, career progress requirement and organizational climate are significant joint predictors of job effectiveness of lecturers. Since the regression weight is an indication of individual variables contribution relatively, the regression results showed that workload related stress and stress from facilities, were the most significant predictors followed by career progress requirement and organizational climate[24].

Complete prevention of stress on the campuses is neither possible nor desirable, because stress is an important stimulus of human growth and creativity, as well as an inevitable part of life [20]. Recommendations suggest that institutions incorporate and organize stress management seminars regularly among academic staff [19], these seminars and programs should be geared towards continually updating academic staff on the most recent preventive measures and coping strategies that they could adopt to reduce work stress. Coping strategies to manage workload and work related stress among others are; managing time appropriately, prioritizing the various works, always taking a short break in whatever work one does, appointment of lecturers into various offices should be well distributed, analysis of one's responsibilities adequately, adequate payment of overtime allowance to lecturers to enhance health checkups on regular basis, earned academic allowance should be regularly paid to lecturers, Lecturers who already occupy a position should not be engaged in more other appointments, more lecturers should be employed to reduce workload on the old ones [25].

Table 1. Socio-demographic characteristics of the participants

Variable	**Respondents in the study N=374**	
	Frequency (N=374)	**Percentage (%)**
Age		
20-30 years	68	18.2
31-40 years	120	32.1
41-50 ears	116	31.0
51 and above	70	18.7
Ethnic Origin		
Yoruba	90	24.1
Igbo	112	29.9
Hausa	82	21.9
Others	90	24.1

Marital Status Single Married Divorced / Separated Widowed	 92 224 47 11	 24.6 59.9 12.6 2.6
Educational Attainment BSc. MSc. PhD Others	 88 186 77 23	 23.5 49.7 20.6 6.1
Teaching Experience Less than 5 years 6-10 years 11-15 ears 16 years and above	 116 101 80 77	 31.0 27.0 21.4 20.6

Table 2. Mean and Standard Deviation

Variables			**Respondents in the study N=374**
	Rating Scale	**Mean**	**SD**
Knowledge	8	4.2	1.4
Attitude	15	8.1	2.5
Reinforcing Factors	15	8.3	2.2
Enabling Factors	15	8.71	2.7
Practice	15	8.6	2.9

Table 3. Knowledge of respondents on stress

S/N	**Knowledge**	**Yes**	**%**	**No**	**%**
1	Stress is a disease	144	38.5	230	61.5
2	Stress only affects the physical and emotional well being of an individual	206	55.1	168	44.9
3	Effects of stress includes tiredness, dizziness, anxiety and long-term depression	237	63.4	137	36.6
4	Stress only affects individuals above 40 years	128	34.2	245	65.5
5	An adverse effect of stress is cardiac arrest in individuals with no previous symptoms of heart disease	212	56.7	162	43.3
6	Eustress and Distress are not forms of stress	163	43.6	211	56.4
7	An individual can be hyper-stressed or hypo-stressed	241	64.6	133	35.4
8	Responds to stress is not based on the individual's capacity to understand his/her stressor	145	38.8	229	61.2

Table 4. Attitudinal Disposition to stress

S/N	Attitudinal Disposition	SA	A	D	SD
1	Stress is common and merely an inconvenience, just like the common cold and I don't think it's a problem	82 (21.9)	117 (31.3)	96 (25.7)	79 (21.1)
2	From what I know about stress, it is age dependent	62 (16.6)	108 (28.9)	134 (35.8)	70 (18.7)
3	Irrespective of stressors, I don't think it has an effect on my health status	68 (18.2)	112 (29.9)	110 (29.4)	84 (22.5)
4	I feel comfortable seeking professional help to manage stress when it becomes overwhelming	86 (23.0)	131 (35.1)	112 (29.9)	45 (12.0)
5	Stress can lead to anxiety disorder, depression, diabetes, hypertension and so on	104 (27.8)	154 (41.2)	59 (15.8)	57 (15.2)

Table 5. Reinforcing environmental factors to stress

S/N	Reinforcing Factors to Stress Coping Mechanisms	SA	A	D	SD
1	Talking to friends about my job stressors can be so relieving	82 (21.9)	141 (37.7)	94 (25.1)	57 (15.2)
2	Certain programs on media outlets enhances or boost my stress management skills	82 (21.9)	152 (40.6)	96 (25.7)	44 (11.8)
3	Seminars on time management and stress coping strategies if organized by the management board will have significant effect on the effective delivery of services	126 (33.7)	122 (32.6)	98 (26.2)	28 (7.5)
4	Supportive family and friends are not essential in stress management	52 (13.9)	106 (28.3)	110 (29.4)	106 (28.3)
5	Social rewards and incentives can be driving forces to productivity even with job overload	111 (29.7)	112 (29.9)	99 (26.5)	52 (13.9)

Table 6. Enabling Factors that promote or discourage stress among respondents

S/N	Enabling Factors to Stress Coping Mechanisms	SA	A	D	SD
1	Changes in the terms and conditions to my job description without consultation do affect my productivity	100 (26.7)	142 (38.0)	86 (23.0)	46 (12.3)
2	Career development and promotion opportunities are essential in my field	129 (34.5)	126 (33.7)	81 (21.7)	38 (10.2)
3	Additional workload and responsibility without the capacity to make certain decisions does not affect my performance	73 (19.5)	85 (22.7)	103 (27.5)	113 (30.2)
4	My physical working conditions are unpleasant (for example, noise, large class population, ventilation, location & space)	109 (29.1)	111 (29.7)	97 (25.9)	57 (15.2)
5	In order to ensure adequate running of the department, I have to take up extra work even when I am not mandated to	81 (21.7)	125 (33.4)	101 (27.0)	67 (17.9)

Table 7. Stress Coping mechanism Practice among respondents

S/N	Stress Coping Mechanism	NA	R	O	VO
1	I manage stress first by identifying the stressor	42 (11.2)	87 (23.3)	131 (35.0)	114 (30.5)
2	I practice either meditation, relaxation, yoga or physical exercise as coping strategy	93 (24.9)	98 (26.2)	127 (34.0)	56 (15.0)
3	I manage my time appropriately and avoid procrastination	44 (11.8)	101 (27.0)	137 (36.6)	92 (24.6)
4	I rely on other coping strategies such as smoking, alcohol consumption or use of other drugs	141 (38.0)	116 (31.0)	66 (17.6)	50 (13.4)
5	I observe at least 30 minutes break out of my working hours daily	51 (13.6)	106 (28.3)	128 (34.2)	86 (23.8)

Conclusion

The personal predisposing predictors of stress are age, sex, marital status, knowledge and attitude. Findings from this study revealed that lecturers have to boost their knowledge of stress irrespective of their various fields of study because it goes beyond knowing the harmful effects of poor stress management and should have a positive attitude towards situations that are detrimental to health and take precautions. Also, the enabling factors that promote or daunt stress are institutional policies, class population, infrastructure, regular salaries and incentives. The enabling factors predicts stress more among lectures as obtained from finding of this study, policies should be reviewed by institutional authorities to reduce the impact of enabling factors of stress such as class population, low or withheld salaries of lecturers, availability of facilities to impact knowledge and other factors, this will improve dedication and the quality of services rendered.

Recommendation

Based on the findings of this study, the following are hereby recommended;

1. Government and educational trust fund should build more equipped infrastructures in tertiary institutions to reduce the disparities experience between private and federal or government owned institutions. Adequate instructional equipment for teaching should be provided in all vocational schools to help curb improvisation thereby promoting effective teaching and workshop practices.
2. Government in collaboration with the NUC, NBTE and NCCE should liaise on a payment plan that works for all parties to avoid conflict of withheld payment, no payment and incomplete payment. All agencies involved in the allocation and distribution should also be engaged.
3. Hazard allowance, in-service training, loans, incentives, all-expense paid trips and exchange programs should be provided to lecturers to motivate them for services rendered to their institutions.
4. Institutions and associations' governing bodies should organize health seminars and training on time management for lecturers, this will enhance knowledge, skills, adaptation and also consultation from experienced senior colleagues in difficult times.
5. Institutions should create activities that will involve members (teaching staff) thereby improving the bond between colleagues, easing tension, creating fun and carrying out physical activities.
6. Counseling sessions should be encouraged by institutions to boost staff confidence, improve their mental health and to serve as a social support system for lecturers to relate issues. This unit can be developed within every tertiary institution across the country.
7. Organization of seminars and workshops by tertiary institutions will go a long way in incorporating time management skills and improvement of stress coping strategies among lecturers which will in turn improve the health status of lecturers.

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