

JOB STRESS AMONG SCHOOL ADMINISTRATORS AND TEACHERS IN NIGERIAN SECONDARY SCHOOLS AND TECHNICAL COLLEGES

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ABSTRACT: *The paper examines stress, job or vocational and workplace stress. It views stress as the responses the body makes while striving to maintain equilibrium and deal with the demands of life. It is a psycho-physiological process which results from the interaction of the individual with the environment and results in disturbances caused to the physiological, psychological and social systems. Job or occupational stress refers to the mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity at the workplace, as well as his effectiveness, personal health and quality of work. Role ambiguity, poor relations with boss, work overload, thwarted ambition and job insecurity as workplace sources of stress have been identified. Where teachers and school heads are under stress, there will be poor teaching quality, low students' satisfaction and low turnover on the overall performance. The paper holds that teachers' lives are often gravely affected by stress which leads to physical ill-health such as headache, stomach upset, aches and pains. Severe and unchecked stress leads to severe ill conditions like high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and heart disease. In critical cases, stress can lead to death. The paper identifies wrong ways to deal with stress to include smoking, using pills or drugs to relax, too much drinking of alcohol and other intoxicating drinks, filling up every minute of the day with activities in order to avoid problems, oversleeping, and transferring one's stressful condition on others. Appropriate strategies to deal with stress, especially for teachers and school heads include regular medical checkups, exercises like jogging, bicycling and muscle relaxation. In addition, proper time management, having a positive outlook on life and bothering less about things one has control over go a long way in assisting teachers and school heads to deal with stress.*

KEYWORDS: Job Stress, Equilibrium, Management, Examines Stress, Workplace Stress

INTRODUCTION

A teacher or school head goes to work to perform his primary duties. As he tries to go about it, he finds that he is yawning over and over again. He discovers that he is desperately in need of sleep. But then he remembers that last night he tried to sleep but sleep deserted him. He woke up with his joints and muscles in pain. He has backache as well. He touches his body and has a feeling that his body temperature is rising. He also seems to be experiencing some bowel movement. His heartbeat is faster and he seems not to have taste for anything. He has tried to whisk this away and concentrate on the day's work. However, he finds that he has, impaired vision, poor problem solving and reduced work performance. All these conditions point to a disturbing human phenomenon called stress.

The paper therefore, examines job stress among school administrators and teachers in Nigerian secondary schools and technical colleges. It examines the classification, signs,

symptoms and sources of stress. It looks at the effects of stress on teachers and school heads. Finally, it considers wrong ways of dealing with stress and then discusses mechanisms for dealing with stress for optimum performance in the school system.

Stress and Job Stress

Stress has been viewed variously from several perspectives. However, it has been viewed mostly from what happens to an individual that causes him unhappiness and lack of calm. The term is defined as the inability of an individual to cope with his or environment (Dobson & Smith, 2000). Chitty (2005) saw stress as the responses the body makes while striving to maintain equilibrium and deal with the demands of life. Khan, Shah, Khan and Gul (2012) saw stress as the body's response to the negative demands of the environment. These negative demands undoubtedly cause unpleasantness, restlessness and rising levels of discomfort. From a psychological point of view, stress refers to "an adaptive response, mediated by individual characteristics and/or psychological processes that is a consequence of any external action, situation, or event that places special physical and/or psychological demands upon a person" (Ivancevich & Matteson in Adams, 1999). It is a psychophysiological process which results from the interaction of the individual with the environment and results in disturbances caused to the physiological, psychological and social systems, depending on the individual's characteristics (Akhlaq, Amad, Mehmood, Husaan & Malik, 2010). In essence, stress can simply be defined as the challenge the body experiences in its bid to maintain equilibrium of existence. It is the degree to which an individual is able to adjust to the demands of the environment. In doing so, the individual makes effort, sometimes in pain to make ends meet or to satisfy the needs considered very necessary. It can also be accepted that stress refers to the exposure of the body to much work in which the body experiences difficulty to cope.

Since stress has been seen as the challenge the body experiences in its effort to meet the demands of the environment, every occupation carries with it what is generally referred to as job stress or occupational stress. Job or occupational stress refers to a mental and physical condition which affects an individual's productivity at the workplace, as well as his effectiveness, personal health and quality of work (Comish & Swindle, 1994). In another view, Kyriacou (2001) saw job stress as the experience of negative emotional states such as frustration, worry, anxiety and depression. Buttressing this point, Reddy and Anuradha (2013) saw job stress as an employee's mental state aroused by a job situation or a combination of situations perceived as presenting excessive and divergent demands.

Teacher Stress and Job Performance

Teaching is one of the professions that have been gracefully recognized not only in Nigeria but globally. However, it has been acknowledged that teaching is a wearing job which "makes large demands on the nervous power and vitality of the teacher" (Adesina, 1990:174). Abundant literature indicates that teaching is not an easy job. It is a stressful occupation (Kyriacou, 2001; Anthoniou et al., 2006; Guthrie, 2006). Consequently, teachers are often exposed to high levels of stress which cut across cultures (Pither, 1995; Boyle et al., 1995; Chan, 1998; Mokdad, 2005)., affect their ability to function effectively (Poornima, 2010). In other words, teachers' lives are often gravely affected by stress which leads to physical ill-health (Mokdad, 2005). Therefore, teacher stress is the experience by a teacher of unpleasant emotions such as tension, frustration, anger and depression, resulting in reduction of his work as a teacher (Kyriacou in Reddy & Anuradha, 2013).

From the foregoing discussions, it is clearly understood that by virtue of their profession, teachers are constantly under stress. This ultimately affects their performance. Teacher job performance, according to Nayyar (1994) is the degree to which an individual teacher executes a particular role or responsibility in line with specified standards or criteria. Teacher performance is the behaviour of a teacher which changes differently within the surrounding environment in which the teacher successfully carries out any assigned role or responsibility (Cheng & Tsu. 1998). Because of stress which the teacher experiences however, he is unable to execute this assignment or role effectively. As Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004), and Tahir (2011) lamented when a teacher is under stress, there will be poor teaching quality, low students' satisfaction and turnover on the overall performance of the teacher.

Classification, Signs, Symptoms and Sources of Stress

Chang (2011) grouped stress into emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural forms of stress. Emotional forms of stress include becoming easily agitated, frustrated and moody, and having difficulty relaxing and quieting one's mind. Physical symptoms of stress are headache, stomach upset, aches, pains, and tense muscles, insomnia, loss of sexual desire and nervousness. Cognitive symptoms of stress include constant worrying, forgetfulness and disorganization, inability to focus and poor judgement. Similarly, behavioural symptoms of stress are changes in appetite and increased use of alcohol, drugs or cigarettes.

A lot of writers on the subject of stress have identified various signs and symptoms of stress. For this paper however, the identifications by Alberti (2005) and Jarvis (2005) have sufficed. The authors listed broadly the following as the signs and symptoms of stress: tension, faster heartbeat, anxiety, fear, need to urinate frequently, pale face, need for more sleep, headache, insomnia, sweaty hands and feet, high blood pressure, heart disease, backache, impaired vision, poor problem solving, reduced work performance, stomach disorder, tense muscles, and impaired decision making.

Sources of stress have been viewed from various perspectives by several writers on the subject. A number of these authors are however, unanimous on a significant number of these sources of stress. According to Godall and Brown in Khan and others (2012), job stress has generally been classified into two: Internal or individual stressors and external stressors. Internal stressors are stressors within the individual and relate to sources like family demand, personal interest conflicting with organizational demand such as in leisure activities, and other inner conflicts. External stressors relate to role ambiguity, career development, work relationships and organizational structure and climate. In the words of Oboegbulem and Ogbonnaya (2004), stress results when the teacher's working or living condition makes demand beyond its capacity to handle physically or emotionally. The authors held that stress results where there is obstacle in the path of goal achievement, conflicting demands, uncertain role prescription (role conflict or role ambiguity) and over demanding work conditions. In simple terms, sources of stress for the teacher can be seen from within the institution (institutional sources) and from outside the institution (outside institutional sources). Institutional sources of stress are fewer rewards, work overload, overpopulated students, tight institutional policies, poor relationship with boss and colleagues and poor opportunity for career progression (Forlin, 2001; Boyd, Lewin & Sager, 2009). Outside institutional sources of stress are demanding parents, tight governmental rules regarding the education sector, ever changing educational policies and reforms, and downsizing (Kyriacou, 2001; Winefield, Boyd, Saebel & Pignata, 2008). Generally however, Busari (2011)

identified sources of stress as social changes, financial problems, accommodation problems, work demands and academic demands.

There are sources of stress that are commonly referred to as workplace sources of stress. Murphy (1995) submitted five workplace sources of stress which are considered very essential for inclusion in this paper:

1. Role in organization which includes role conflict, role ambiguity, responsibility of staff, and conflicts occurring due to ill-defined organizational boundaries.
2. Career development: Over promotion, under promotion, lack of job security and thwarted ambition.
3. Relationship at work: Poor relations with boss, subordinates or colleagues, difficulties in delegation, threat of violence and harassment.
4. Organizational structure and climate which include participation or non-participation in decision making, Management style and communication patterns.
5. Unique to the job which includes workload, meaningfulness of work, hours of work, physical environment and isolation at work.

The workplace can be a potential source of stress for many people. The workplace supposedly is where individuals perform their primary duties so as to earn a living for themselves. However, certain conditions arising from developments within the workplace are likely to make living unpalatable for workers. Delay in promotions, selected promotions, denial of promotions, non-implementation of agreed salary scales, denial of fringe benefits, poor communication between principals and his assistants, non-delegation of responsibilities, sidelining, duplication of functions, growing disaffection due to perceived poor leadership, lack of support from subordinates, and many others all contribute to fuel stress within an organization, and especially the school. The most disturbing aspect of it all is when an individual's role, by virtue of his office, is quietly taken away from him, and left to just make do with newspaper reading every morning. This in many cases is common with the superior officer and his immediate assistants, e.g, a governor of a state and his deputy, the principal of a school and his vice principal, etc etc. When a slight misunderstanding occurs between these officers, the assistants are left to "fend" for themselves.

A lot of studies on stress at the workplace demonstrate that in earnest there have been a growing disaffection among workers due mainly to unfavourable working conditions which have contributed substantially to stress in the workers. Worse hit by this development, it need be pointed out, are teachers. For instance, the study by Alkhalefa (1999) showed that in Bahrain in work conditions, salaries, bonuses and allowances, status of education, supervision, school facilities, workload and career development, were the major causes of stress for teachers. Consequently, teachers were totally dissatisfied with their job, showed less sympathy towards students, felt depressed and irritable, planned for their lessons and were less committed to this work. In similar studies, Traverse and Cooper (1993), Boyle et al. (1995), and Pithers and Soden (1998) found that workload, poor professional relationship with colleagues, inadequate salary, pupil mis-behaviour, difficult interactions with parents and expectations of other staff were potential sources of stress.

Effects of Stress on Teachers

Routine (normal) stress has been known to be alright for effective functioning of the human body and mind (Khan et al., 2012). However, when teachers and school administrators experience incessant stress that is likely leading to something that may prove quite devastating physically, emotionally, and psychologically. In less severe cases, the effects of stress on teachers are low morale, job disaffection, absenteeism, low productivity and job turn over (McCormic, 1997; Winfield et al., 2003). Gillespie, Wash, Winefield, Dua and Stough (201) held that with stress, teachers experience a feeling of exhaustion and they perform very low. In the words of Durosaro in Bada and Falana (2012), stress makes people to be nagging, uncooperative with coworkers and highly intolerant of people around them. Prolonged stress decreases mental capacity and results in reduced problem-solving skills (Chitty, 2005).

Brown and Ralph (199) summarized the following effects of stress on teachers, among others: Reduction in work performance and output, loss of confidence and motivation, inability to manage line or delegate, feelings of alienation and inadequacy, increasing introversion, irritability with colleagues, unwillingness to cooperate, frequent irrational conflict at work, increased substance, persistent negative thoughts, loss of appetite and accident proneness. If there is a growing disaffection within the school system due to bad leadership, the school head is not likely to secure the cooperation of his subordinates. When this situation intensifies, the school head or any superior officer for that matter, experiences a feeling of “aloneness”, knowing that his subordinates appear to be either afraid of him or afraid of any contact with his harassing conduct. When he cannot secure the cooperation of staff under him, he is likely experience a feeling of anger towards all around him. In this situation, he is not happy, his subordinates are not happy either. In the end, the goals of the school will not be realized.

Untreated stressor unchecked stress can grow to unprecedented dimensions. In many instances, teachers and school would want to “pretend” or take it for granted that all is well with them. When a teacher or a school head gets too overburdened with office or school work and does not care to check his condition of health, he is driving himself towards the ultimate consequences of stress. Stress can develop to ultimate levels of high blood pressure, high headache (migraine), heart disease, impairment of the immune system and death (Ekundayo & Kolawole, 2013). The authors added that stress is also linked to stroke, diabetes, ulcer, miscarriage during pregnancy, muscle and joint pain, allergies and premature tooth loss. The work of Gorman (2007) buttressed this conditions when it found that excessive stress does a lot of harm to the immune system and can as well reduce an individual’s life span. In fact, in the words of Edlin and Golanty (2007), prolonged stress affects the whole person.

Wrong Ways of Handling Stress

There are certain bad behaviours exhibited by people who think that they are viable ways of handling stress. These behaviours are considered unhealthy. Some of these bad behaviour have been enumerated by Smith and Siegel (2012) to include the following: Smoking, using pills or drugs to relax, too much drinking of alcohol and other intoxicating drinks, filling up every minute of the day with activities in order to avoid problems, oversleeping, transferring one’s stressful condition on others, withdrawing from friends, family and activities, over eating or under eating, and using pills or drugs to relax. All these behavioural conditions are common with quite a lot of people who experience stress almost on a daily basis. A critical examination of these consciously adopted methods which are behavioural does not reveal any

lasting solutions to the problem of stress however. In very severe cases, the drugs turn out to constitute serious health challenges which require time and resources to deal with.

Mechanisms for Dealing with Stress

Stress is a human condition that affects the body, mind and psychology of an individual. A physical exhaustion is likely to affect the way a person thinks and conducts himself and as well psychological state. Because unchecked or uncontrolled stress can lead to devastating consequences like high blood pressure, diabetes, stroke and death, it is important to examine ways that teachers and school heads can adopt to deal with the trend.

A number of writers on the subject of stress have suggested various strategies for dealing with stress. Kagan, Kagan and Watson (1995) and Cooley and Yovanoff (1996) suggested the following the following strategies for controlling stress:

1. Bio-feedback- This is essentially a medical check-up techniques that involves electronic measurement of mind-body functions (muscle tension, intestinal activity, blood flow, breathing heartbeat) and other techniques to control those functions.
2. Aerobic activity- This involves bicycling, swimming and jogging.
3. Muscle relaxation- This technique is a self-regulated, progressive body relaxation that puts the individual in an extremely restful mood.

For teachers to manage stress at their workplaces, Kalejaiye-Matti and others (2007) have this to say: Good planning and effective use of time, being careful not to bother about things one cannot change, having a positive outlook on life, learning to relax, having regular physical exercise, reduction in teaching load through a conscious means, improving oneself through education and training, and learning to relax.

Management of stress appears to be as personal a matter as the individual himself. In effect, no individual should expect another individual to come and manage his level of stress. In other words, stress management involves a cultivation of useful habits or behaviours by a stressful person. To deal with stress from an individual position, WebMD Medical Reference (2009) argued that an individual needs to first of all find out what is causing the stress, look for ways to reduce the amount of stress, and learning healthy ways to relieve stress or to reduce its harmful effects. These ways are possible when the individual learns to take good care of himself, tries out new ways of thinking, asks for help and speaks up. In this connection, according to Smith and Siegel (2012), an individual needs to look closely at his habits, attitudes and excuses, and not just explain away stress as being just a temporary condition.

CONCLUSION

The paper has looked at stress as a disturbing human phenomenon in which the body tries to maintain equilibrium as it deals with life challenges. The paper also saw stress as the inability of an individual to cope with his or environment. Job or occupational stress was seen as the workplace stress, which means any mental and physical condition that affects an individual's productivity at the workplace, as well as his effectiveness, personal health and quality of work.

Teaching has been seen as a stressful occupation and teachers are often exposed to high levels of stress which affect their ability to function effectively. The paper has discussed the five classifications of stress, namely, emotional, physical, cognitive and behavioural forms of stress. Signs and symptoms of stress which include faster anxiety, fear, need to urinate frequently, pale face, need for more sleep, headache, insomnia, sweaty hands and feet, high blood pressure, have been discussed. Sources of stress were also identified and discussed. Workplace sources of stress have been identified, among others, as role in organization, relationship at work and organizational structure and climate. In essence, the paper holds that stress results when the teacher's working or living condition makes demand beyond its capacity to handle physically or emotionally. Equally, sources of stress for the teacher have been identified as institutional sources and external sources (sources from outside the institution).

The effects of stress have been identified and discussed. These effects include loss of confidence and motivation, inability to manage line or delegate, feelings of alienation and inadequacy, increasing introversion, irritability with colleagues and unwillingness to cooperate. When stress has persisted and reached unprecedented levels, it can lead to severe ill conditions such as hypertension, stroke, diabetes and finally to death. To avert these conditions from taking hold of a teacher or school head, measures have been recommended which include regular medical checkups, exercises like jogging or bicycling and muscle relaxation. In addition, teachers and school heads need to make use of time efficiently, taking time not to bother about things they cannot change, and having a positive outlook on life. This way, the life of teachers will be greatly enhanced and prolonged.

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