

The Influence of Work Stress and Job Satisfaction on Soldiers' Morale in Theater of War in Northeast Nigeria

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ABSTRACT: *Military deployment has consistently been shown to expose soldiers to distressing situations, with reported deleterious effects on emotional and mental functioning. It was hypothesized that work stress and job satisfaction would significantly influence the morale of soldiers deployed in northeast Nigeria. The design was a cross-sectional survey which was employed to purposively select One Hundred and Sixteen military personnel who are currently serving in different military formations across the North East. Result from correlational analysis for hypothesis one showed a statistical significant negative relationship between work stress and soldiers' morale ($r = -.06$; $p < .01$). Multiple regression analysis findings on hypothesis two indicated a significant joint [$R = .585$, $R^2 = .34$, $F(2, 113) = 29.33$, $P < .01$] and independent influence of work stress on soldiers' morale ($\beta = -.57$, $t = .75$, $P < .05$); it was recommended that Nigerian Army should make work environment less stressful.*

KEYWORDS: work-stress, job-satisfaction, morale, soldiers, performance

INTRODUCTION

World over, winning a war requires the ability to demonstrate high fighting spirit and confidence among soldiers. This clearly shows that successful operation in any military deployment is dependent on the level of morale and fighting spirit that soldiers demonstrate in prosecuting the war. Morale is the confidence built over time upon the command structure and the level of commitment a soldier feels towards his responsibilities that keeps him going, especially when there are factors that militates against his confidence. According James (1947), morale is defined as that condition quality, in the individual soldier and in the unit command, which holds the soldier, holds the unit to the performance of duty despite every opposing force or influence. Therefore, the morale of the Nigerian soldier is that thing that keeps the soldier mentally and physically fit to carry out their duties even in the face of increasing challenges.

In recent years, poor morale has become one of the major problems reported among employees exposed to high stress occupation, such as police and military personnel (Scott, 2022). Among

US military personnel for instance, studies have shown diminishing work morale among troops, with corresponding effects on operational work performance and efficiency (Spector, 2017; The American Institute of Stress, 2022). In Nigeria, evidences from soldiers fighting insurgency in the northeast have pointed to the possibility of poor morale among troops. A recent study conducted by Ochogwu, Mshelizah and Jimoh (2021), reported that Nigerian soldiers, particularly those fighting in the northeast are fighting with a low morale. He further stated that there is need for the Nigerian military to review its counter-insurgency strategy to reflect the human dimension of military operations, which has been long neglected, so as to build the morale and fighting spirit of the soldiers. Additionally, reports also indicate evidences of suicide, lack of commitment and willingness to leave the job (early retirement) among troops. For instance, just between 2020 to date, more than three hundred soldiers have left the Army, while many are being persecuted for negligence and brutal act of omission in the course of the operation (Adebayo, 2021). Clearly, these are indications of low morale among soldiers involved in prosecuting the war. It is therefore necessary that if we must win the battle against Boko Haram insurgency, the issue of soldiers' morale must be taken seriously, especially on identifying risk factors that guide intervention for morale boosting needed for operational success.

Stress can be an influential factor to workers' morale. According to Scott (2022), stress is a response to anything that requires attention. It is defined as any event that is interpreted as threatening or exceeding capacity to handle, resulting to psychological and behavioural responses and consequences. Work stress is basically, a stress an individual passes through, due to the nature and task of their job. It is often related to their jobs and sometimes resulting from either too much or too small work being assigned to the individual (Ebiai & Chinonso, 2022). Within the military work environment, Combat or Operational Stress Reactions (COSRs) is defined as the sum of the physical emotional, cognitive or behavioural reactions, adverse consequences, or psychological injuries of service members who have been exposed to stressful or traumatic events in combat or military operation (The American Institute of Stress, 2022). For the purpose of this paper, we defined military stress as the total stress that soldiers experience as a result of their deployment to combat zones. They include stressful experiences that are found both in and out of theatre of war.

Military personnel undergo a lot of activities that evoke stress response. Exposure to killings, taking part in killing of comrades or civilians, lack of basic care or adequate rest can be stressful and traumatic. This coupled with lack of adequate support from military leaders can exert great influence on the morale and ability to engage in war, which could portend deleterious consequences to the soldiers and the public (American Institute of Stress, 2022). In Nigeria, ever since the rise of Niger Delta Militants in South-South Nigeria in early 21st century, the life of the average military personnel has been filled with surprises and irregularities in terms of deployment. Upsurge in banditry, kidnapping and a host of other related criminal activities have continued to rob off its consequences on the Nigerians and by extension the military (Ebiai, Quadri, Jahwando and Chinonso, 2021). Most of these stressors relate to poor weather, unfriendly or hostile behaviours of the commanders and communities where they serve, exposure to death and explosive devices amongst others. Apparently, these experiences are

unpleasant and may tend to impact negatively on their morale and overall operational performance.

In addition, the level of job satisfaction among personnel can have great influence on morale. Job-satisfaction is defined as a positive emotional response a person experience when doing their job or when they are present at work (BasuMallick, 2021). Job satisfaction often come from a number of factors, which include but not limited to, poor remuneration, work-stress, inefficiency at work place amongst others (Ebiai & Chinonso, 2022). It's important to know that job satisfaction varies from employee to employee. In the same workplace under the same conditions, the factors that help one employee feel good about their job may not apply to another employee. Job satisfaction has been defined in this paper as the level of comfort and fulfillment that a soldier experience as a result of carrying out his military duties. Research have shown that military personnel who derived satisfaction from their work are more likely to develop high confidence in battle. On the contrary, soldiers who find their job un/less satisfactory are less likely to perform impressively and experience more deployment difficulties (Toppa, 2015). In Nigeria, Oliver and Obidi (2017) noted that some Nigerian soldiers are not really satisfied with their job. Most Nigerian soldiers are not well paid, which goes a long way to demoralize them and affect their levels of job satisfaction. Also, when soldiers are satisfied with their job, they tend to device better ways of managing stress, which would also go a long way in boasting their morale (Nakkas, Annen & Brand, 2016).

However, most studies on stress have focused more on outcome such as mental health (Sutherland & Coo-per, 2019); illegal drugs (Bray, Fairbank & Marsden, 2018); emotional exhaustion (Tetrick, Slack, DaSilva, & Sinclair, 2020); poor decision making (Cannon-Bowers and Salas, 2018) and many other physiological, cognitive, social, emotional, and performance anomalies (Salas, Driskell, & Hughes, 2000). Till date, the role of work stress and job satisfaction in impacting soldiers' morale has not been well understood. This goes to suggest that, as Nigerian military personnel have continued to experience continuous stress in prosecution of the insurgency war, there is need to examine whether stressful events and job satisfaction are implicated, so that appropriate recommendations can be made, towards ameliorating the problem.

The objective of this study was therefore to examine the influence of work stress and job satisfaction on the morale of soldiers currently engaging in insurgency war in the North East, Nigeria. Our study formulated and tested two hypotheses; (1) that there will be a significant relationship between work stress, job satisfaction and the morale level of soldiers deployed to the northeast; (2), there will be significant independent and joint influence of work stress and job satisfaction on the morale level of soldiers deployed to the northeast, Nigeria.

METHOD

Design

We utilized a cross-sectional survey design to obtain data and test research hypotheses. This design was chosen because it enabled the researchers to gather large amount of data from the

personnel within a short period, to ascertain how work stress and job satisfaction influence their morale. The design domiciled and measured work stress and job satisfaction as independent variables, while soldiers' morale was measured as a dependent variable.

Participants and Procedure

This study was conducted among 116 purposively sampled military personnel who are currently serving in four locations across Borno state. The four formations were; Biu, New Marte, Kukawa and Buratai. These are some of the most stressful areas of the insurgency operation, where many personnel prosecuting the war have been exposed to unprecedented work stress, with devastating consequences. These areas have had reports of personnel retreating, neglected duty and even made attempts to retire prematurely as a result of perceived work stress.

Before embarking on this research, we complied with ethical principles as obtainable in Helsinki declaration: permission was obtained, informed consent sought, voluntariness and confidentiality strictly observed and there wasn't any exposure of soldiers to risk of any kind through the research. Participants were approached at their various locations with questionnaires to fill. One of the researchers (a personnel) facilitated the process of data gathering at the various formations. In all, data collection lasted for two weeks, after which they were screened and analysed.

All the soldiers who took part in the study were males, with the mean age of 27.4 years. Majority 69.8% were married, while 30.2% were single personnel. Concerning rank status, majority 89.7% were junior soldiers, while 10.3% were officers. For the junior soldiers, their ranks ranged between Private to Army Warrant Officer), while about 7 soldiers were from the rank of Second Lieutenant and above. A total of 5 soldiers did not identify their units and could not be used in the multiple regression analysis.

Measures

Job Satisfaction. We assessed soldiers' perception of job satisfaction using the Job Satisfaction Survey-2(Spector, 1985). The JSS-2 inquiries about the salary, pay policies, promotion opportunities, supervision, fringe benefits, coworkers, and general satisfaction of the participants. Participants responded to the items using a 6-point agreement scale ranging from 1 (highly satisfied) to 5 (highly unsatisfied). The scale has been widely used and found to have acceptable psychometric properties (Sanchez, Rebecca, Bray & Robert, 2004). Internal consistency for the currently study was Cronbach's alpha .82.

Work Stress. We assessed stress using the Work Stress Scale (Holmgren, Hensing, & Dahlin-Ivanoff, 2009). The inventory inquires on how often the participants experience stress related events in their workplace. Participants responded to the items using a 5-point agreement scale ranging from 1 (less than once a month) to 5 (several times a day). The scale was been widely used and found to have acceptable psychometric properties, including internal reliability of .89. In the present study, we obtained internal consistency of .87.

Morale. The Morale Inventory (Osman et al.2018) was adapted and used to assess soldiers' level of morale relating to the deployment. The instrument measures items like goals, group and cohesion, mental health, selflessness affection and spirituality with responses ranging from 1 (very low) to 10 (very high). The instrument has demonstrated acceptable psychometric properties in studies involving security personnel (Spector, Dwyer & Jex, 2008). In our study, we found internal consistency of .88, which makes is acceptable and valid for assessing morale among samples in this study.

Analysis

First the data was crossed checked to be sure that participants gave correct information and that the data collected were complete. Then it was coded, entered and cleaned before being analysed using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS-V-23). Mean, median and percentages were used to analyse demographic data, while zero-order correlation and multiple regression analysis were used to analyse hypothesis one and two, at P values less than 0.05.

RESULTS

Data Presentation

Figure 1: Zero-Order Correlation Showing Relationship among Study Variables

Variable	1	2	3	M	SD
Morale	-			49.2	24.3
Age	.201*	-		23.7	10.8
Work Stress	-.58**	.36**	-	33.9	11.1
Job Satisfaction	.124	.53**	-.075	131.0	28.6

** Correlation is significant at 0.01 levels (2tailed)

We began by examining the interrelationship to establish how the study variables are related. From the analysis as shown in the correlation table above, there is a significant positive relationship between soldier's age and their morale ($r=.03$; $p<.05$); implying that advancement in the age of the solders will significantly result in higher morale level. Result further indicated a significant negative association between work stress and morale ($r=-.06$; $p<.01$); meaning that increasing work stress will lead to consequential decrease in the morale of troops in northeast, Nigeria. There was no significant relationship between job satisfaction and soldier's morale and the result of correlational analysis did not reach the conventional level of statistical significance.

Figure 2: Multiple Regression Table Showing the Influence of Work Stress and Job Satisfaction on Soldier's Morale in North-East, Nigeria.

Variable	R	R ²	df	F	β	t	P
Constant	.585	.34	2,113	29.33			
Work Stress					-.57	.75	<.05
Job Satisfaction					.08	1.07	>.05

The result in table 2 indicates a significant joint influence of work stress and job satisfaction on the morale of soldiers in northeast, Nigeria [$R = .585$, $R^2 = .34$, $F(2,113) = 29.33$, $P < .01$], accounting for 34% variance. Results further indicated an independent influence of work stress ($\beta = -.57$, $t = .75$, $P < .05$) on the soldier's morale. However, there was no independent influence of job satisfaction on the morale level of the soldiers ($\beta = .08$, $t = 1.07$, $P > .05$). From the results, it can be further interpreted that soldiers who face increasing work demands are less likely to experience good morale in their workplace.

DISCUSSION

The morale of soldiers is very vital to operational success and general work performance in military environment. In view of this and obvious lack of research on soldiers' morale, we examined the influence of work stress and job satisfaction on morale level in one hundred and sixteen military personnel who are currently fighting insurgency across four formations in northeast, Nigeria. Based on previous literature findings, we hypothesized that work stress and job satisfaction would be significantly associated with soldiers' morale. Our second hypothesis tested for the independent and joint influence of work stress and job satisfaction on the soldiers' morale. Using zero-order correlational analysis, we found a significant negative relationship between work stress and the soldiers' morale, partially confirming the hypothesis. This result indicated that, when soldiers in this operation who are experiencing more stress and less likely to report impressive morale to fight. That means, their continuous experience of operational stress has consequential negative association with their morale.

The findings of the present paper on the relationship between stress and soldiers' morale is consistent to Tucker, Sinclair and Thomas, (2005) in USA, but with little variation, which could be as a result of sociocultural differences, age demarcation and difference in sample size. Additionally, the difference in data collection tool might also account for the little variation. Our findings on hypothesis two revealed a significant joint influence of work stress and job satisfaction on morale. The findings further showed that only work stress independently and significantly influenced soldiers' morale. It was discovered that the soldiers' level of work-stress contributed highly but negatively to their morale. The reason is obvious; that the more a soldier is stressed the less likely he will be enthusiastic to fight or engage passionately in the combat activities. Though the level of job satisfaction had no significant relationship and influence on morale level; this might be as a result of the soldiers having feelings that there is no job and likely because they are committed to defending their nation at all cost, whether they are satisfied with the job or not. This finding corroborates previous findings (e.g. Nakkas, et al. 2016; Spector, 2017), that when soldiers are satisfied with their job, they tend to devise better ways of managing stress, which would also go a long way in boosting their morale (Nakkas, Annen & Brand, 2016).

The low morale level observed in some soldiers in the northeast Nigeria can be attributed to the stress levels that they undergo. Most importantly, having more experiences with these stressful events diminishes the morale of military personnel fighting insurgency in the northeast. Based on this, we recommend that the Nigerian Army and commanders should

endeavor to make operational grounds less stressful for soldiers so that their morale can remain intact, and even more to combat insurgency in the country. We also made the following recommendations, that if implemented, can go a long way to help boost the morale of the soldiers:

1. Troops should be educated on stress management skills
2. Troops should be cared for, in terms of operational needs, especially as regard to their mental health.
3. Promotions should come as and when due, as this will go a long way to build confidence in the soldiers and boost their fighting spirit.
4. To improve the job satisfaction that soldiers have from their jobs, the soldiers should be properly placed to where they will do well and get a level of self-fulfillment, this will help reduce the internal stress created by the organization which ultimately affects the morale and fighting spirit of the soldiers.
- 5.

Although our study has some impressive findings and far-reaching recommendations, it is not without some limitations. In summary, we relied on self-reports, used a limited sample and scope-all which could have potential impact on the validity and generalizability of findings outside the study area.

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