

Influence of gender on stress in a work environment: A case of university staff members in Kenya

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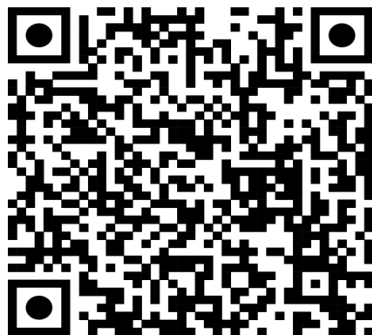
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Abstract

This study's objective was to determine the influence of gender on stress among the non-teaching staff of Egerton University. Stress affects an individual's physical and mental health, performance and interpersonal relationships. This study involved a survey of 100 non-teaching staff of the Njoro Campus. A proportionate random sample was obtained after the stratification of employees by cadre and gender. The questionnaire was pre-tested, and necessary modifications were implemented before the actual data collection. Data on employee personal traits, job cadre, educational background, attitude to work and stress coping strategies were collected using a questionnaire and self-report test. Data collected were analysed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The research established that gender has no effect on stress among the non-academic staff of Egerton University. There is a need to establish a staff-support centre at the University, where employees can be offered emotional and psychological support through professional counselling.

Key Terms: Gender, Stress, Work Environment, University Staff Members.

INTRODUCTION

Families from all cultural groups experience family stress. Although the causes of family stress and the types of issues that are most stressful may vary by cultural group, all families seem to experience and understand the concept of family stress. It is established that this causes a lot of interpersonal wrangles within the family. However, by cultivating harmony within the family, you psychologically fortify each member and thus contribute to a more balanced and helpful society (Morris, 1988). Some of the suggestions which have proved useful to others in developing better family relationships include: making the home an attractive place, investing time and effort in the home, teaching by example, effective communication, and failure to have unrealistic expectations, adapting to the needs of each age, and sharing religious beliefs (Melgosa, 2001).

On the other hand, many leading corporations have accepted the fact that human resources constitute the most expensive form of capital for any organisation and are becoming increasingly concerned about the cost of health breakdown, which is closely linked to many disorders. It is clear that any employee problems that cost money, hamper performance, and adversely affect employee health and well-being originate from interpersonal relationships. A high level of stress affects the way people interact, hence low productivity. The most frequent problems of stress are in the boss-employee relationship. Sometimes the same person is both the boss and the employee (Powell, 2000). Occupational stress detracts from the quality of working life for a very large number of workers all over the world (Gherman, 1981). The find his study shows that gender and job position does not have a significant influence on the stress level of the employees.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The conceptual literature on stress management depict working women as being prone to the same stressor experienced by working men. In addition, women face other unique stressors like discrimination, domestic

violence, nurturing young ones, home keeping, and taking care of ageing parents, among others. Even though women earning salaries face many stressors, the conventional wisdom that work is necessarily harmful to women has not been proven. Benner (1993) found little evidence to support a global relationship between paid employment and either mental or physical health in women and clearly detrimental effects on others. These effects depended on the characteristics of specific women, their family background, their working environment, etc.

Employment is more conducive to unmarried women as compared to married women. Employed women enjoy employment only if they have supportive husbands who can help with house chores and other domestic work. If a woman desires to remain employed, she will tend to work hard to maintain her job and home roles as a wife and mother. Job characteristics like working overtime and lack of control can decrease motivation in working. Most women prefer working in the formal sector compared to being housewives. If they set social support from their families, they are likely to enjoy their employment.

The common assumption that employment is not for women is unwarranted. Although employed women experience more stressors as compared to their counterparts who are not employed, they appear to be better off than women who are not employed. Although multiple roles for women produce a number of benefits, certain work conditions are deleterious to women's well-being (Benner, 1993).

Personality and Stress

Friedman and Rosen's man classified personality types into two: Type A with a high risk of heart attacks and type B with a minimum risk of heart attacks (Wolman, 1989). Responses manifested under stress differ either quantitatively or qualitatively, or both (Vinacke, 1973). Swift (1977) pointed out that people's personalities are different, and hence their ability to tolerate stress experiences also differs.

Table 1: Personality Types and their Characteristics

Type A	Type B
Personality	Personality
Constant movement	Tranquil movement
Impatience	Calm

Tense facial expression	Relaxed facial expression
Roars of laughter	Soft smile
Dissatisfied with position	Satisfied with position
Competitive at work, games	Avoids competitive situations
Complains frequently	Rarely complains
Speech:	Speech :
Quick and loud	Slow and soft
With fluctuation and emphasis	Uniform tone
Expressive and gesticulating	Calm with a few gestures
Immediate response	Responds after pausing
Gives direct and brief responses	Gives extensive answers
Hurries the speech of others	Waits and response

(Melgosa 2001, P. 65)

RESULTS AND FINDINGS

Only one of the fifteen variables used revealed that gender is significant for the employees who suffer stress. The t-test results are presented in Table 2. The variable, 'normal memory' ($t=-2.423$), was significant.

This depicts that gender influences the normal memory of the individual under stress. In other words, men are stressed differently than women in this respect. All the other variables were not significant. This means that both male and female employees were equally affected by stress with respect to all the other variables.

Table 2: Results for Differences between Genders

Variables	Std. Error	Std Coeff.	t-test	Sig.
Sweat a lot	0.074	0.142	1.095	0.277
Feel tired and lack energy	0.087	0.027	0.164	0.87
Normal memory	0.091	-0.326	-2.423	0.018 **
Muscles tense up	0.093	0.065	0.333	0.74
Suffer from allergies	0.073	-0.168	-1.102	0.274
Backaches	0.096	0.336	1.742	0.086
Suffer from digestive problems	0.088	-0.19	-1.214	0.229
Have headaches	0.109	0.112	0.599	0.551
Little appetite	0.079	-0.155	-0.948	0.347
Suffer from insomnia	0.082	-0.32	-1.772	0.081
Blood pressure average and constant	0.064	0.109	0.783	0.436
Feel like choking	0.088	0.152	0.919	0.361
Experiencing rapid heartbeats	0.087	-0.061	-0.368	0.714
Normal bowel movement	0.057	0.024	0.185	0.854
Have abnormal fears	0.067	0.085	0.638	0.526

Key: ** means significant.

Upon further analysis, F-test confirmed that overall, there were no significant differences between males

and females in terms of susceptibility to stress. These results are presented in Table 3.

Table 3: Analysis of Variance Results for Gender Differences

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	4.417	15	0.294	1.235	0.269
Residual	15.969	67	0.238	0	0
Total	20.386	82	0	0	0

These results contradict Long (1995), who cites gender as one of the factors that account for differences in job stress. However, they agree with a study by Miller (2000), which explained the interaction of gender and culture in a manager's experiences of work stress and found that there were no differences in consequences of work stress and sources of stressors for both males and female managers.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion: This study was aimed at assessing the effect of gender on stress among the non-teaching staff of Egerton University. This study concluded that gender has no effect on stress among the non-academic staff of Egerton University. Both males and females are equally stressed given a stressor.

Recommendations: If the non-academic staff of Egerton University are to be effective and fruitful in their Job assignments, then it requires concerted efforts from all the stakeholders in the University. In view of this, the researcher offers the following recommendations. Establishment of a stress management programme and employee assistance programme. The University should employ a staff counsellor. The role of guidance and counselling in reducing stress levels among the non-academic staff of Egerton University. Investigation of the various stressors of non-academic staff of Egerton University. The role of University administration in reducing stress among the non-academic staff of Egerton University.

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