

THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS LEVELS AND THE JOB GRADE OF MEMBERS OF UNIVERSITY NON-ACADEMIC STAFF IN KENYA

Author

Paul Makono Ombati^{id}

Email: revombati@yahoo.com

Egerton University, Kenya.

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Abstract

The relationship between stress levels and the job position (grade) of the non-academic staff members at Egerton University, Njoro Campus was the purpose of this study. 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 stratifying employees by cadre and gender. Questionnaires were pre-tested, and necessary modifications were implemented before the actual datacollection. 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. The data collected were analysed using descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that job position does not influence the level of stress of non-academic employees. 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. Another study can be carried out to generalise the findings of this study in similar institutions with caution.

Key terms: Job position, non-academic staff, relationship, stress levels.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Stress is a major concern in human life. This is perhaps due to its role in determining how human beings relate, work and interact with each other. Insecurity, lack of confidence and withdrawal tendencies associated with stress lead to lack of performance, poor working relations and indulgence in unhealthy relationships among the workers. Stress is invisible, but its effects are great. Unexplained interpersonal misunderstanding, infighting and industrial action by members of staff have become a common phenomenon not only at Egerton University but also in other Kenyan public universities. No study has been carried out to explain the role of stress in interpersonal relationships and work performance in Kenya and, in particular, within the public universities. This study established the impact of stress on work and interpersonal relationships among the non-teaching staff, which was the main cause of employees' discontent with one another as well as with the management of the University: a case of Egerton University, Kenya.

A study carried out in America revealed that the following factors accounted for differences in job stress at the workplace: gender, level of employee in an organisation, income of the employee, occupation and family situation. The survey found that more and more workers were reporting that their jobs are very stressful and that they are burned out, hence poor interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, families and their bosses. Some of the examples of personal characteristics that determine behaviour include personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, cognition and the environment. The surroundings influence people with regard to learning, motivation and performance (Mitchell & Larson, 1987). Every living being experiences stress, including animals. To some extent, a certain amount of stress is necessary in order to accomplish set goals. A complete absence of stress means death (Melgosa, 2001). Selye (1956) points out that stress is the adverse physical and emotional reactions to demands put on the individual by upsetting, unsettling conditions or experiences called stressors. Stress impacts negatively on the quality of an individual's output and on how one relates with others. On the other hand, excessive stress can cause adverse consequences to human life. Stress is a common factor leading to diseases, and many people are suffering and being treated for stress-related complications (Melgosa, 2001).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is not limited to life and death situations. It can be positive or negative, although only its negative tends to be emphasised. The good things that happen to us, as well as bad ones, cause stress because they carry with them addictive demands that require change or adaptation if an individual is to meet his or her needs (Morris, 1988). According to Selye (1956), "a complete absence of stress means death. A limited amount of stress is necessary in order to accomplish goals and projects".

Powell (2000) states that when perceived demands outweigh capabilities, there is an imbalance, and one begins to suffer physical and emotional symptoms. The symptoms manifested, particularly in the body, are determined by the family background and genetic temperament. Powell continues to state that it is important to remember that any stress one experiences is a result of one's interpretation of the demands and capabilities themselves. He has outlined several signs. He starts by talking about a panic attack. He states that a panic attack is triggered by an overload of stress, worries and life events that reverberate between one's conscious mind and unconscious mind. This can make one experience frightening symptoms, which cause the body to react in fight/flight mode. Another sign of stress is hyperventilation. This is irregular breathing in which one breathes more quickly than usual. This can result in too much oxygen and

too little carbon dioxide, which can alter the acidity in the bloodstream, which could cause dizziness, shaking, sweating and tension.

Powell gives another sign of stress, and that is obsessive behaviour. This means that one is prone to intrusive, worrying, repetitive and often nonsensical thoughts. He states that in an attempt to neutralise or put right such thoughts, one may develop ritualistic behaviours or compulsions, such as repetitive washing of hands, counting or hoarding (Powell, 2000). Stress has two origins. These are internal and external factors. Internal factors include one's personality, temperament, and level of self-control. External factors include environment, job, family or studies. Melgosa (2001) states that when the external stress is particularly strong, even the best-equipped people suffer stress. On the other hand, when someone is psychologically fragile, even the weakest stress factors affect him or her.

Stress in the workplace can originate from various sources or a single source. In addition, stress impacts both employees and employers alike. As stated by the Canadian Health Association, fear of job redundancy, lay-offs brought about by economic uncertainties, and increased demands for overtime due to staff cutbacks act as negative stressors (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2025). Workers who are pressurised to perform can get caught in a downward spiral of increasing efforts to attain the set targets without motivation. The continuous requirement to work at optimum performance takes its toll on job satisfaction. Job dissatisfaction, employee turnover, reduced efficiency, sickness, drug abuse, internal competition and conflicts, demotivation and poor decisions are all by-products of an overstressed workplace. Job position does not influence the level of stress in the place of work. This sentiment concurs with the findings of this study. According to Gherman (1981), the following factors cause stress in the work environment. Job overload; lack of job description, taboos, job fit, production quota, communication breakdown, involuntary transfers, delayed salary, poor working conditions, lack of job satisfaction, unrealistic expectations and poor relationships among workers.

3.0 FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION

The results indicate that job position (grade) is not a significant factor in causing stress. This means that the job position does not influence the level of stress of employees, as indicated in Table 1 below. T-test results show that none of the items were significant at ≤ 0.05 . The level of stress is not dependent on the job position of the employee. This means that all the employees are likely to become stressed irrespective of their grades. The level of an employee in an organisation is a factor that accounts for stress differences. Similarly, Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2025) points out that employee's level in an organization, together with the task designated for the levels, work roles, management style and career concerns such as job security, promotion and advancement, lead to stress.

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Table 1. Influence of Job Position (Grade) on the Level of Stress of Employees

Variables	Std. Error	Std. Coeff.	t-test	Sig.
Feel pressurized	0.115	0.085	0.565	0.574
Feel emotionally drained	0.105	0.038	0.258	0.797
Relating with others	0.101	0.061	0.454	0.651
Stressful assignment	0.106	0.160	1.034	0.305
Stressful work environment	0.104	0.097	0.705	0.483
Ignored at work	0.106	-0.184	-1.279	0.205
Come late to work	0.108	0.131	1.000	0.321
Not tempted	0.082	-0.149	-1.164	0.249
Valued at work by colleagues	0.076	-0.136	-0.901	0.371
My voice goes high	0.119	-0.090	-0.630	0.531
Problem communicating with colleagues	0.118	0.112	0.889	0.377
No confidence at work	0.135	0.157	1.234	0.222
Satisfied with the level of achievement	0.056	0.065	0.497	0.621
Go on vacation	0.101	-0.007	-0.057	0.954
Do not like greeting friends	0.161	0.131	0.935	0.353

Upon further analysis, the results of the F-test, as indicated in Table 1, confirmed that there were no differences in the level of stress between the two cadres of employees.

Table 2: Analysis of Variance for Job Positions

Model	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
Regression	3.712	15	0.247	0.866	0.604
Residual	19.155	67	0.286		
Total	22.867	82			

The findings indicate that there is no difference between the two grades of employees as far as the level of stress is concerned. Therefore, job position (grade) does not increase the level of stress significantly.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusion: This study was to establish the relationship between stress levels and the job position (grade) of the non-academic staff members at Egerton University Njoro Campus. According to the findings here, the researcher concluded that job position (grade) does not influence the level of stress of non-academic employees of Egerton University. The results revealed that the employees are equally stressed regardless of the job position (grade) given the same stressor.

Recommendation: The researcher, therefore, recommends that in-service and refresher courses on time management, financial management, and communication skills, among others, should be offered regularly to non-teaching staff.

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