

PREVALENCE AND CORRELATES OF STRESS AMONG THE NON-TEACHING UNIVERSITY STAFF IN KENYA

Author

Paul Makono Ombati^{id}

Email: revombati@yahoo.com

Egerton University, Kenya.

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Abstract

This study was intended to assess the prevalence and correlates of stress among the non-teaching university staff in Kenya. 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 questionnaires were pre-tested, and the researcher implemented necessary modifications before 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. Therefore, the research found that members of the non-academic staff are experiencing significant levels of stress. 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. After taking caution, this study can be generalised to other similar institutions.

Key terms: Assessing, levels of stress, Non-teaching staff.

1.0 INTRODUCTION

Everyone, regardless of ethnicity, age or gender, experiences work-related stress (Melgosa, 2001). The nature of work is changing, and work-related stress can threaten employees' health and the organisation's overall well-being (Tooley, 1996). When stress is overstretched, it can lead to poor interpersonal relationships exemplified through hatred, anger, lack of concern for others, negative criticism, isolation from others, violence, rage, role conflict, resentment, marital problems, suspicion, distrust, disloyalty, detachment, pettiness, irritability, and cynicism (Tooley, 1996). This sentiment concurs with this study's findings that stress affects the process of interaction. Doctors from the USA have reported that two-thirds of visits to physicians result from stress-related symptoms, and the most frequently prescribed medications are for ulcers and hypertension and tranquillisers (Mitchell & Larson, 1987).

Stress manifests itself as physical, emotional and even spiritual illnesses as well as loss of productivity, sales and occasionally, what appears to sabotage the job, knowingly or otherwise. Stress on the job, like non-work-related stress, is always due to solvable problems. Hence when the employer is not knowledgeable and alert, the organisation may suffer unnecessary costs and lowered productivity. Responses to job or occupational stress can be categorised as physiological, psychological and behavioural (Corsin, 1984).

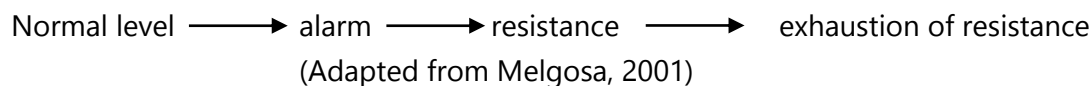
Job-related stress occurs because of many factors, especially the work environment. It varies in duration, type and amount and from one person to the other. Employees at Egerton University are handling a heavy workload due to accommodating four groups in session with no time for holidays. Stress may be a major but unrecognised issue within the institution. The University has 2,603 employees broadly classified into lower, middle and top-level cadres. There is also another broad categorisation as teaching, administrative and junior staff. Whichever way, the lower and middle-level cadres comprise the majority of employees and hence stress levels within this group can profoundly affect the institution's overall performance.

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW

As early as 1956, Selye suggested that stress was a common factor in causing disease, and this theory has been studied and confirmed (Melgosa, 2001). Selye's findings showed that each time an alien or aversive stressor agent was applied, changes in the subject were observed. These changes were in areas such as the thymus and adrenal glands and the development of ulcers in the acid-sensitive stomach lining. Once we are unable to put up with the demands of our environment, when we are threatened with physical or psychological harm, we begin to feel tense and uncomfortable. We are experiencing stress. This term describes our emotional and physiological reactions to situations in which we are threatened beyond our capacity to cope or endure (Morris, 1988).

Gatchel and others (1989) argue that prolonged stress can affect immunity. One of the ancient Greek physicians, Hippocrates (460-370 BC), observed the possible negative impact of stress and separated suffering caused by diseases (pathos) from the toil involved in resisting and fighting it (puns) (Colman, 1997). Hippocrates proposed stress as a feature of illness and the energy and wear caused by attempts to combat disease. Other scholars like Walter Cannon were among the first to use the term stress and indicated that both physiological and psychological components are vital (Colman, 1997). He has used the term "great emotional stress" to describe a powerful psycho-physiological response process that seemed to influence emotion in animals (Colman, 1997). Melgosa (2001) projected that the process of psychological appraisal was very important in determining the type of response produced by a stressor and that stressors have different emotional consequences.

Selye (1956) proposed that we react to physical and psychological stress in three stages that he called the general adaptation syndrome; stress does not sneak up on its victim, capturing them in an unpredictable surprise attack. Stress passes through the following stages from the time it appears until it reaches its most acute level.



In the alarm stage, it begins when the body recognises that it must fight off some physical or psychological danger. Emotions run high. We become more sensitive and alert. The body reacts to a threat in the environment (Mitchell & Larson, 1987). Respiration and heartbeat quicken muscles tense, and other physiological changes occur. This enables us to develop coping resources in order to regain self-control. If neither of these actions reduces stress, then one moves to the second stage (resistance stage). In this stage, physical symptoms and signs of strain appear as we struggle against increasing psychological disorganisation. Resistance occurs when a stressor is stubborn. This leads to physiological and mental changes (Mitchell & Larson, 1987). In this case, stress extends beyond the initial alarm, and one experiences a loss of energy and lowered production level (Melgosa, 2001).

The final stage of stress is exhaustion. This occurs when the person uses increasingly ineffective defence mechanisms in a desperate attempt to bring the stress under control. This final stage of stress is characterised by fatigue, anxiety and depression, which may occur sequentially or simultaneously. Other people may show signs of burnout such as inability to concentrate, irritability, procrastination and cynical belief that nothing is worthwhile (Morris, 1988). Anger, tension, irritability and nervousness are among the indicators in the phase. At times physical symptoms such as skin or stomach problems occur, and some victims of burnout opt to use drugs and alcohol in an effort to cope with stress. If stress continues, irreparable physical or psychological damage may occur, even death (Morris, 1988).

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 responds

(Melgosa, 2001, p.65)

3.0 METHODS

The study was a descriptive survey that aimed at establishing the stress levels of non-teaching staff at Egerton University Njoro Campus. The study was conducted at the Njoro campus of Egerton University. The target population for this study was the non-teaching staff comprising 1570. The actual population included in the sampling frame was 769 employees in the I-IV and A-F cadres. Respondents were selected through stratified random sampling. Classification of the employees was based on the grading system of the University. There were four strata, two from each grade level: I-IV and A-F. In every stratum, employees were classified according to sex so as to give a sub-stratum. A proportionate sample was taken from each sub-stratum based on the number of employees in the respective sub-strata. In collecting information, a questionnaire was administered. A pilot study was carried out in Laikipia Campus, Egerton University, to validate the instrument and test its reliability. Twenty subjects were selected, and the questionnaires were

administered to them. The validity of the stress inventory was determined by running it concurrently with the already validated Colien's perceived stress scale. The scores on both tests produced similar results. The reliability measure is based on the Cronbach alpha scale scored.74 reliability. The SPSS programme was used to analyse data. Both descriptive and inferential statistics were used for analysis. Descriptive statistics included frequency counts, percentages and mean, while inferential statistics included t-tests and ANOVA. All significant tests were done at $\alpha \leq 0.05$.

4.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of the study was to assess the levels of stress among the non-teaching staff at Egerton University Njoro campus. The results and discussion presented were based on a total of 83 non-teaching employees who filled out the questionnaires. The results show that the mean stress level is 3.1, with a range of 1.9 to 3.8. This tends to occasionally, which is position three in the Likert scale as indicated in table 2. This depicts that majority of the employees are occasionally stressed as opposed to being always or often stressed.

Table 2: Stress Levels of Non-academic Staff of Egerton University.

Stress level variable	N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	SD
Feel pressurised	83.0	1.0	4.0	2.9	0.7
Feel emotionally drained	83.0	1.0	5.0	3.2	0.7
Relating with others	83.0	1.0	4.0	1.9	0.7
Stressful assignment	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.0	0.8
Stressful work environment	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.2	0.7
Ignored at work	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.4	0.7
Come late to work	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.3	0.6
Not tempted	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.1	0.8
Valued at work by colleagues	83.0	1.0	4.0	2.2	1.0
My voice goes high	83.0	2.0	4.0	3.3	0.6
Problem communicating with colleagues	83.0	1.0	4.0	3.7	0.6
No confidence at work	83.0	2.0	4.0	3.8	0.5
Satisfied with the level of achievement	83.0	1.0	4.0	2.7	1.2
Do not like greeting friends	83.0	2.0	4.0	3.8	0.5
Average				3.1	0.7

A small amount of stress is necessary for one to meet goals. It is also important for stress not to be intense and permanent and accompanied by periods of rest and relaxation (Mumiukha, 2003). Further, the results indicate that a few of the employees are never stressed at all, given their response to the various stress

level variables as indicated in the table. Item three, relating to others, had a response range of very good (1) to the poor (4). Therefore, the reported mean of 1.9 tends to level 2 (good), indicating that the employees interact well with one another. This is confirmed by the item on greeting friends with a mean of 3.8, which tends towards never, meaning that they have no problem greeting one another. The occasional stress seems to emanate from an occasionally stressful work environment (mean = 3.2), stressful assignments (mean = 3.0), and being ignored at work (mean = 3.4).

5.0 CONCLUSIONS AND RECOMMENDATION

Conclusions: This study was to assess the levels of stress among the non-teaching staff at Egerton University Njoro campus. These findings show that it was concluded that the non-academic staff of Egerton University are stressed. This, to an extent, affects their performance and concentration on their duties. 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.

Recommendation: In view of this, the researcher recommended that routine guidance and counselling should be introduced. At an opportune time, group guidance sessions could be organised to sensitise the non-academic staff on how to cope with likely stressors in the course of their duties.

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