

## Workplace Stress and its Effect on Performance; Special Reference to Educational Sector

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**Abstract:** Workplace stress is one of the most challenging issues in many institutions. Recently due to the competitive nature of many institutions in this global age, employers have placed more demands on employees work especially in the private educational sector. This has brought excessive pressure which is beyond employees' abilities and their capacity hence inhibiting individual functioning, productivity and performance. The increase level of this stress has led to a change in the behavior of employees and their attachment with the work. Stress is therefore seen to be detrimental to the health of employees, health of organization and its performance. This research examines the studies on workplace stress and its effects on performance and how these effects can be managed in the organization. The objective of the research was to identify the stressors at the workplace, to examine the effect of workplace stressors on employees' performance and lastly, to identify strategies used in handling stress at the workplace. Both primary and secondary data collection method were used. The total population for the study was 100 and the sample size used was 50 whereas systematic sampling technique was employed. It was found that workload, longer working hours, not designing job to meet employees strength, weakness and their pressure point were workplace stressors. It was recommended that the management needs to know the employees strength, weakness and their pressure point, balancing work life, with better social support in order to reduce stress and to improve performance.

**Keywords:** Stress, Workplace, stressors, Performance and social support

## INTRODUCTION

The health of every organization depends on the ability of its employees to work efficiently and effectively in stress free and conducive work environment to achieve organizational goal. Everyone encounters stress at the workplace. This is said to be inevitable among people who work in an organization. Employers see stress to be something that emanates from the employee's personal life than from the work they do. They also perceived that 'stressees' are lazy people who do not accept challenge and do not want to go an extra mile beyond their work role. A study done by Smith et al. (2000), suggested that working in the educational sector is the most stressful job which contribute to ill-health. According to Mone and London [1], their engagement study remarks that certain factors in the work environment can negatively affect employees behaviour in the organization and this could lead to burnout which indicates a prolong stress employees have. Most of employees are exposed to all kinds of stressors but the beauty of these stressors was being able to manage to achieve a positive outcome. Some stressors are caused by organizational change, management unable to spot the strength and weaknesses of their employees thus not closely paying attention to

individual resumes given, the job analysis and the right competency mapping of employees. The main purpose of Management in education sector is to effectively utilize and manage its human resource (employees) towards the accomplishment of organizational goals. However if certain policies are not effectively administered to balance employees work life, it leads to stress and unable to stay connected to other activities. A prolong of these stress result to mental and ill-health of employees and retards in performance and productivity.

The National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health [2], defined work stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, and needs. However, workplace stress is mostly being caused by job demands, relationship and the environmental factors. This has brought about absenteeism, emotional disorders, low level of engagement of employees towards their work, frequent accident and conflict hence low performance standard among employees and organization as a whole in both private and public sector. According to the Health and Safety Executive, in 2005: more than 500,000 people in

the UK believed they were experiencing work-related stress at a level that was making them ill 245,000 people first became aware of work-related stress, depression or anxiety in the previous 12 months.

Again paraphrasing Christian Nordqvist (2015), "he said stress is anything that poses a challenge or a threat to our well-being. Stress affects individuals thought, feelings, attitude and behaviour towards work and their relationship with people and their health. Stress is inevitable and can never be disputed however the human resource management can put certain measures in place to reduce the level of stress employees face and also balance their work-life in order to improve organizational performance, employees' health, and their level of satisfaction and engagement with the work.

### OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

- To identify the organizational stressors at the workplace
- To examine the effect of workplace stressors on performance
- To identify strategies used in handling stress at the workplace

### Hypothesis

H<sub>0</sub>= there is no relationship between workplace stressors and performance

H<sub>1</sub>= there is a relationship between workplace stressors and performance

### LITERATURE REVIEW

#### Theoretical framework of workplace stress and performance

Numerous researchers have researched on this topic since 18<sup>th</sup> century. Hans Selye who is known to be the father of stress, in his research study [3], defined stress as a nonspecific response of the body to any sort of demand made on it. Selye defines this "of stimuli are capable demand," which could include a stimulus or an event, as a stressor and notes that a wide variety of producing the same internal stress response. Similarly, Kozusznik [4], posited from the medical point of view that stress is proven to be detrimental to health. MacLean (1985), remarks that "stress is sometimes used to denote stressful events, sometimes to refer to the effect of these events on work performance, and sometimes to mean an individual's reaction in terms of disordered health. 'That which arises when the pressures placed upon an individual exceeds the perceived capacity of that individual to cope. Similarly, Copper *et al.* (1988) defined stress as when the magnitude of stressors exceeds individual capacity to cope. Stacciarini and Troccoli, (2003), were of the notion that, the basic rationale underpinning the concept of occupational stress is when the work situation has certain demands, and that problem in meeting these results to illness or psychological distress.

### Types of stress

There are three types of stress namely, eustress and distress, hypo-stress and hyper-stress. One can consider a stress as eustress base on how the person feels about it and is able to manage it to achieve a positive useful outcome.

**Eustress:** From Shamsul (2014), his view on eustress is the stress that results from a "positive" view of an event or situation, which is why it is also called "good stress.

**Distress/dysfunctional:** type of stress on the other hand, is being overwhelmed with stressors in certain situation which negatively leads to distress, unpleasant feeling and as a result affect one's attitude towards a stimuli hence low performance.

**Hyper-Stress:** If the person pushed beyond what one can handle, which turns in to Hyper-stress. More times it occurs due to workload. This type of stress occurs when constant heavy financial difficulties, work both at home and office, Continuous tension.

### Sources of stressors at the Workplace

Study from previous research; have identified stressors, to be the causes of stress that make people feel under pressure which result to ill health and many others. Murphy [5] listed some workplace stressors to be factors unique to the job. Examples are Workload, variety, Autonomy, Physical environment (noise) etc. Vandenberg *et al.*, (2002), their support model of workplace stress explained that, the basic premise of a person environment fit theory; is that stress emanates from a misfit between a person and its environment. When individuals perceive that their workplace are not good, or do not fit well with their needs, wants, and desires that they personally would like fulfilled from work, the inconsistencies create diverse strains, and affect employees' health and their wellbeing. Furthermore, Wainwright D and Calnan M (2002), have explored in their study that the origins of stress exclusively are in changes at work, to the oversight of other social, political and cultural factors. And considering the study done by Maslach & Leiter [6], stress can be triggered by personal, personality-centered, organizational and work environment. This shows that stress does not solely emanate from employees.

However from the educational perspective of stress, stressors can be categorized into two. Swaleha Sindhi (2013) identified two types of stressors in the educational sector namely professional stressor and personal stressor. A professional stressors are stressors such as excessive paper work, disruptive students, workload, lack of mobility, role conflict etc. whereas personal stressors include reason that causes employees at the educational sector to be stressed. They are health

relationship issues, financial problems, living conditions.

### **Symptoms of stress**

Prakash B. (2015), in his research 'work stress of employees', he suggested that, some early symptoms of stress has to do with head ache, Fatigue, increased absenteeism, altered performance, changes in attitude, mood or behavior, irritable, aggressive, conflict with others, diminished work relationships, tiredness.

### **Work Performance**

Work Performance can be explained by Rubina *et al* [7], as the outcome of when skill, effort and nature of the work condition work together. He further added that knowledge, abilities and competencies of the employees, and the degree of effort employees put in their work and the conditions of work which facilitates employee's performance. However, Management concern for its organization is about performance of employees and not about the factors and conditions to work, thus not paying attention to these factors result to stress. High or good performance indicates commitment, efficiency and effectiveness, job satisfaction and engagement. Bartlett & Ghoshal, [8] posited that the success and failure of an organization is highly determined by the performance of their employees. So when there is an increase in employees stress, performance is therefore affected.

### **Effects of workplace stress on performance**

According to Leitch (2003), uncertainty can lead to worst-case scenario thinking, distract the individual from the important task, or increase time needed for decision making

### **Individual performance**

Scott (1966) finds that individual performance increases with stress and resulting arousal to an optimal point and then decreases as stress and stimulation increase beyond this optimum. To explain further his view was that a prolong increase in the stress level of an individual renders them to be inactive towards their work, hence can lead to low performance. Similarly, Sanders (1983), and Gaillard and Steyvers (1989), find that performance is optimal when arousal is at moderate levels. When arousal is either too high or too low, performance declines. Usman Ali *et al* (2014), also found that workload, inadequate monetary reward causes stress which reduces employee efficiency.

### **Excessive work strain**

Excessive work strain encourages potentially damaging behaviors', such as smoking, alcoholism, eating disorders, or self-harm. Cranwell Ward in 1995 cited the DSS statistics from 1991-1992, that about 140 million days' benefit is paid out to men and 55.4 million given to women for absence from work attributed to mental and stress-related causes. Moreover, Palmer and Cooper [9], said effect of stress

also result to increased sickness, absence, increased staff turnover, reduced staff performance, reduced staff morale and loyalty and increased hostility hence there is employee disengagement.

### **Relationship between Stress and Performance**

The study by Usman Ali *et al.* in 2014 shows that workload, role conflict and inadequate monetary reward are the main cause of employees' stress that leads to reduced employee efficiency. Similarly Rubina *et al.* [7] discovered a negative relationship between stress and job performance.

Jennifer Kavanagh [10] posited that; several authors have found a negative linear relationship between stress and performance, other indication shows that this relationship is actually an inverted-U shape. Their study revealed that individual performance on a given task will be lower at high and low levels of stress and optimal at moderate levels of stress. At moderate levels of stress, performance is likely to be improved by the presence of enough stimulation to keep the individual vigilant and alert, but not enough to divert or absorb his energy and focus. At low levels of stress, in contrast, activation and alertness may be too low to foster effective performance, while at high levels of stress; arousal is too high to be conducive to task performance. Maslach & Leiter [6], also said that the effect of high stress affect job performance, there is poor concentration, increase frustration with the job and loss of enthusiasm for the job. Amoah-Binfoh *et al* [11] in their study reveals that, demotivated and frustrated employees typically leave the job which has a negative impact on production. Money is not the ultimate solution, rather job enrichment, affiliation, and even simply expressing thanks can motivate employees and foster their performance these reduce stress to the lowest ebb. The ILO [12], claims that stress is known world-wide as a major challenge to individual mental and physical health, and organizational health. Employees under stress are also more likely to be unhealthy, poorly motivated, and less productive and less safe at work hence makes it very difficult for their organizations to succeed in a competitive market.

### **Strategies adopted in managing stress at the workplace**

Several authors have discussed about the strategic actions that individual; organization should adhere to in handling the alarming issue of stress faced by workers in the organization. Methods of coping with stress should contribute to individual's emotional and physical health. Kossek and Ozeki [13], asserted that, work-life policies effectively used in the organization will help ensure that employees are not stressed at work and will have a higher job and life satisfaction. The researcher further added the effective work-life policy strategy stimulate a positive attitude of employees and cause them to fully concentrate on their job. Viswesvaran *et al.* [14], in their research also claimed,

that provision of social support example counseling services, emotional and informational support at the workplace are vital resources and strategies that management can use in coping with stress level by reducing stressors and strains.

Murphy (1988) also suggested in his study that, stress can be prevented through three levels of

organizational activities namely; Primary level activity which focused on the reduction of stressors, at the secondary level is stress management, and the tertiary level focus on how to deal with the consequences of stress. This can be done through employee assistance program, counseling and welfare.

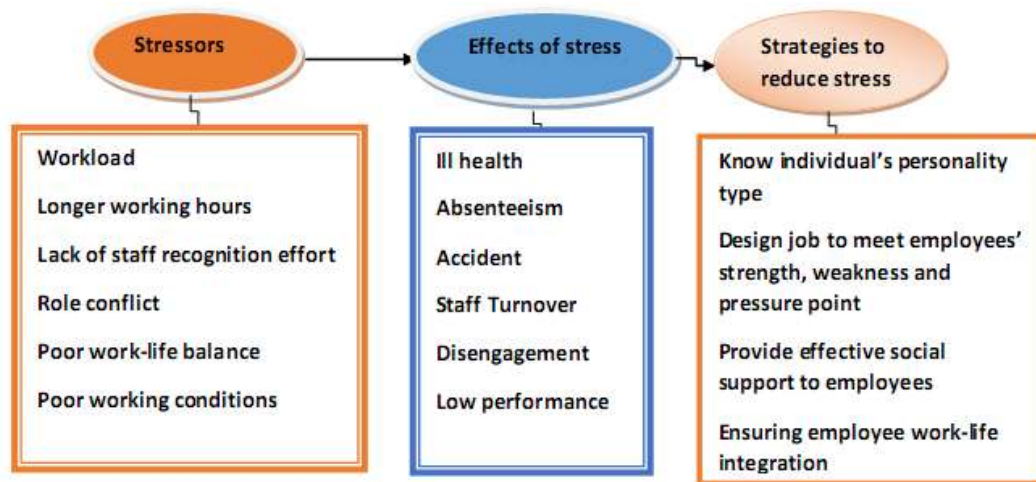


Fig-1: Model developed for the study

**METHODOLOGY**

To ensure that all aspects of this descriptive research were analyzed critically before drawing relevant conclusions, both quantitative and qualitative approaches were employed. Both primary and secondary data collection method were used. The primary data was collected by the use of questionnaires. The total population for the study was 100 and the target sample size used was 50. The researcher used

systematic sampling technique to obtain the sample size. Thus  $100/50=2.S=P/TS$ . So here every second employee stands the chance of being selected in the organization thus (multiple of 2 up to 100). The statistical tool used were percentage analyses, chi-square and regression analysis.

**DATA ANALYSIS**

Table 1: Demographic profile

Questions	Labels	Total N=50	Percentages (100%)
1. Gender	a. Male	28	56.0
	b. female	22	44.0
2. Age	a. 26-33	13	26.0
	b. 34-41	19	38.0
	c. 42-49	9	18.0
	d. 50- 57	6	12.0
	e. 58 and above	3	6.0
3. Marital status	a. single	4	8.0
	b. married	46	92.0
4. Family size	a. 1-3	18	36.0
	b. 4-7	23	46.0
	c. 7 and above	9	18.0
5. Educational qualification	a. Diploma	5	10.0
	b. Degree (first/masters/PhD)	45	90.0
6. Means of transport	a. Bike	35	70.0
	b. Private car	15	30.0
7. Area of life stress emanates most	a. Family	14	28.0
	b. Work	36	72.0
8. Activities that makes one exhausted at the workplace	a. Workload	25	50.0
	b. Role conflict	10	20.0

	c. low recognition and rewards of employees effort	15	30.0
9. Spend longer hours at the workplace	a. Yes	38	76.0
	b. No	12	24.0
10. Jobs are designed to meet employees' strength and pressure point.	a. strongly agree	10	20.0
	b. agree	9	18.0
	c. strongly disagree	18	36.0
	d. disagree	13	26.0
11. Effects of stressful activities on employee relationships	a. Family	8	16.0
	b. Colleagues	12	24.0
	c. Superiors	9	18.0
	d. Students	21	42.0
12. Dysfunctional stress leads to	a. Absenteeism	19	38.0
	b. Employee turnover	5	10.0
	c. Disengagement	12	24.0
	d. Conflict	4	8.0
	e. Accident	10	20.0

Field survey (2017)

### Interpretation

From the demographic profile table, it could be interpreted that, majority of the respondents representing (56%) were males whilst (44%) of the respondents were females. Also the table shows that respondents representing (26%) between the age group of 26-33, respondents representing (38%) were also between the age of 34- 41, whilst the respondents representing (18%), (12%) and (6%) were between the age group of 42-49, 50-57 and 58 and above respectively. It could also be seen that, majority of the respondents representing (92%) were married whilst minority of the respondents (8%) were single. The study from the above table also recorded that, respondents representing (36%) had a family size of 1-3, the majority of the respondents representing (46%) also said their family size was between 4-7 whilst (18%) of the respondents had a family size from 7 and above. The table also revealed that, the educational qualification of the respondents in the organizations, with majority of the respondents representing (90%) had a higher qualification (first/ masters/ PhD) with minority of the respondents representing (10%) had only Diploma in the organization. The above table also shows the employees means of transport to the workplace, of which (70%) said they come to the workplace through Bikes whilst (30%) employees go to work with their private cars. These gave an idea that; unfavorable demographic factors increases employees stress level and it could affect their performance.

Secondly, from the same table, employees were asked about their area of life where stress mostly emanates from and it could be seen that majority of the respondents representing (72%) responded that, stress emanates mostly from the work they do whilst respondents representing (14%) said their family was the area of stress. This explains that, stress was paramount at the workplace than from home. Again, majority of the respondents representing (50%) reported that, workload made employees feel exhausted, (30%)

of the employees also said, low recognition and rewards of employees effort made them feel exhausted whilst (20%) feels much exhausted when there was role conflict in the organization.

Employees were also asked if they spend longer hours at the workplace, majority of the respondents representing (76%) were of the view that, they spend longer hours at the workplace whilst respondents representing (24%) also spend longer hours at the workplace. This shows that, most of the employees are prone to stress at the workplace which can also affect their health and performance. Furthermore, employees were asked if their superiors assigned jobs according to their strength, weakness and their pressure points in which (36%) representing the majority of the respondents explained that, they strongly disagreed with that, (26%) respondents also disagreed that, jobs were not assigned according to their strength, weakness and pressure points, however (20%) and (18%) of the respondents strongly agreed and agreed respectively with that. This shows that jobs were not assigned to employees according to their capabilities therefore there was stress and this affected their performance and passion for the work they do.

Employees were also asked about the area of their relationship where stress affect most, here majority (42%) of the employees expressed that, it affect their relationship with students, respondents representing (24%) said stress affect their relationship with their colleagues, (18%) of the employees were of the view that, it affects their relationship with their superiors whilst minority of the respondents representing (16%) said their stress level affect their relationship with their family. Lastly, it could be inferred from the table, that respondents representing (38%) said high physical stress, emotional and moral distress leads to absenteeism, (24%) of the respondents also expressed that, dysfunctional stress lead to disengagement at the workplace, (20%) of respondents also revealed that

dysfunctional stress leads to accident, whilst respondents representing (10%) and (8%) said high

physical stress, emotional and moral distress leads to employee turnover and conflict respectively.

**Table 2: Model Summary**

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate	Change Statistics				
					R Square Change	F Change	df1	df2	Sig. F Change
1	.984 <sup>a</sup>	.969	.966	1.07680	.969	472.124	3	46	.000

a. Predictors: (Constant), high expectation and unclear task, low salary and benefit, poor work life balance

The results above show that, there was strong relationship between workplace stressors and performance. (*Workplace Stressors: High expectation and unclear task, low salary and benefit and poor work life balance practices*). From the results, the R-value was (98.4%). This shows a very strong relationship

between the two variables. The R<sup>2</sup> Value of .969 also indicates that 97% of variance in performance is accounted for by the workplace stressors. The F and associated P-value shows the strength of the overall relationship of the variables.

**Table 3: Coefficients<sup>a</sup>**

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	T	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
1	(Constant)	-1.249	.660		-1.894	.065
	High expectation and unclear task	2.671	.307	.535	8.695	.000
	Low salary and benefit	1.007	.285	.297	3.533	.001
	Poor work life balance	.956	.274	.199	3.489	.001

a. Dependent Variable: performance

The table shows that high expectation and unclear task (.000), low salary and benefit (.001), and poor work-life balance practices (.001) have an impact

on performance. Therefore the regression model is valid.

**Table 4: Strategies used in managing stress at the workplace**

	Frequency	Percent	Valid percent	Cumulative percent
Counseling section	10	20.0	20.0	20.0
Leave	25	50.0	50.0	70.0
Time management seminars	2	4.0	4.0	74.0
Reducing work activities	7	14.0	14.0	88.0
Health screening	6	12.0	12.0	100
Total	50	100.0	100.0	

The table above indicates that, 20% of the respondents, said employees stress was manage by counseling section, majority of the respondents representing 50% also expressed that, the strategy used in managing stress at the workplace was leave, 4% of the minority said they provide time management seminars, whilst 14% representing the respondents said reducing work activities was the strategy used in managing stress and lastly 12% of the respondents explained that, Health screening was also used to manage employee stress at the workplace.

**FINDINGS AND CONCLUSIONS**

From the above analysis it was basically observed that majority of the population were males. This indicates that stress was paramount among male teachers in the organization under study which affected their performance. Again it was found that, the major

means of transport for the employees were bikes, which reduced the level of stress and the hassle in commutation. Furthermore the study discovered that most of the employees’ source of stress emanated from the work they do rather than their family. Moreso the study showed that, activities like workload, low recognition and reward of employees’ effort makes them exhausted. The study gave an idea that, stress level of employees at the workplace was high. The study also revealed that, most of the employees spend longer hours at the workplace. It was also found that jobs were not assigned to meet the employees’ strength, weakness and their pressure points. This eventually explains the high level of stress employees go through in their organization. However, the stress level of employees also revealed that, stress mostly affects employee’s relationship with students, colleagues but less effect on their relationship with their family. It was

concluded that high physical stress, emotional stress and moral distress leads to absenteeism and disengagement at the workplace; this affected the performance of employees. It can also be concluded that, there was a positive relationship between workplace stressors and performance. This means that, an increase in salary and benefit increases employees' performance. Proper work life balance practices also increases performance and lastly high expectation and clear task given increases performance of employees. The alternative hypothesis supported the researchers claim. Thus there was a positive relationship between workplace stressors and performance. It was also concluded that, strategies like leaves, counseling section were mostly used to reduce stress at the workplace. However management failed to reduced the work activities of employees. The researchers recommended that, the following strategies; when implemented by management can help reduce stress to enhance employees' performance in the institution. They are; Identifying employees' strength and weakness, Assigning the job to meet employees capabilities (assigning right courses, to the right teacher), Provision of Employee Social Support (ESS), Recognizing employees stress issues, Effective Stress Management Programme (ESMP), time management seminar's, frequent monitoring of job behavior and work-life integration or balance like (sport activities, inter departments games, quiz competitions, questions bank apps etc).

#### Managerial implication

From the study, the operational definition for employees stress is *when an individual cognitive energy, emotional energy and physical energy are exposed to constant pressure from the demands of their work environment which affect their health and performance*. These effects on individual's health and attachment to work, hinders performance and productivity at the workplace. Considering the age group of the employees, it was discovered that majority of the employees were younger workforce, this implies that; good salaries and benefits need to be provided to meet their needs. However, management inability to provide enough to meet employees' financial needs could result to stress and low performance. Considering employees stress level and their relationship effect, stress affects employee-student relationship. Students in this case are customers and are the business of every institution, so management must put measures in place to reduce the stress level; employees go through so they can build a better relationship that will continuously improve students' performance. Working longer hours at the workplace could also imply that, employees stress level increases and this affect their presentism at work; nevertheless working longer hours does not always results to performance. The nature of job must be such that the management should design jobs that factor the individuals' strength, weakness and their pressure point. In doing this; it improves the right competency mapping

of employees which increases presentism, effectiveness, efficiency, commitment, satisfaction, creativity, productivity and enhances performance. Lastly through counseling and other stress management strategies, employees become aware of stressors and how they can mitigate their own areas of stress. Amoah-Binfeh Kenneth *et al.* [15] recommended positive thinking is the best form of increase and accomplishment, therefore for stress-free life positive thinking is recommended.

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