EXPLORING OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND JOB INVOLVEMENT OF WORKERS IN PRIVATE AND PUBLIC ORGANIZATIONS

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Abstract

Stress is an important health area of concern among employees globally. The study was structured to investigate the influence of occupational stress on the job involvement of workers. Stress is a complex concept and it has drawn the attention of many to studying its consequences. The variables that were considered includes age, gender, marital status, and types of organizations. These variables have been identified as having implications for occupational stress which influences job involvement of workers in public and private organizations. This is a cross-sectional survey. Questionnaire consisting of two standardized scales (Occupational stress and Job involvement) were administered to 180 workers. One hypothesis was raised and tested using t-test of independent. Results show that there is no significant influence of occupational stress and job involvement of workers in public and private organizations (t = .905, df = 178, p>.05). This study shows that occupational stress exerts strong influence on the job involvement of workers in both private and public organizations. The implications of this study to both employees (public and private) and employers and organizations were highlighted and recommendations made.

Keywords: Occupational Stress, Job Involvement, Public and Private Organizations

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress is the harmful physical and emotional responses that occurs when the requirements of the job does not match the capabilities, resources or needs of the worker. Though life does not stop exposing us to potent stressors; occupational stress and workplace health have become issues of great

concern over the last decade, both internationally and nationally. Given the value of work, the amount of time spent at work and the current changes that are affecting the nature of work, it is not surprising that work stress appears to be increasing (Szymanski, 1999). It is a complex concept that has attracted the attention of many researchers. Stress is a part of life and as noted by Ebiai and Bumba (2004), there are stressors at home, in the market place, at school, in the work place and wherever humans are found.

Occupational stress has become one major influence on the health and well-being of employees in the modern workplace. Although there is a personality component in an individual's susceptibility to work place stress, it is nonetheless a long and accepted fact that the work place is a major source of socio-psychological stressors, strain and subsequent ill-health (Lazarus, DeLongis, Folkman & Gruen, 1985; Magrolis, Kroes & Quinn, 1974). Occupational stress as defined by Malta (2004) is any discomfort which is felt and perceived at a personal level and triggered by instances, events or situations that are too intense and frequent in nature so as to exceed a person's coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately. Managing stress and its attendant health and productivity consequences may be one of the biggest challenge facing organizations (Murphy, 1995). The effects on organizations could be substantial, ranging from lost production time to increased workers compensation claims and skyrocketing health insurance cost.

Chovwen (2013) made a fine distinction between distress and eustress, positing that boring and monotonous job, for instance, can make an employee feel distressed, thus, stifling motivation to perform well, whereas a challenging job can make an employee experience eustress, and enhance motivation to perform well. Eustress is constructive and progressive in the sense that it is inevitable; it is that form of stress emanating from workplace roles that tasks employees' ingenuity and stretches their abilities to reach for greater heights. On the other hand, distress is stagnating and retrogressive in the sense that it makes one unproductive/counterproductive and irritably dependent; it is that form of stress emanating from workplace roles that do not effectively and efficiently utilize employees' abilities or exceed their abilities to cope and adjust appropriately.

There are several sources of stress but for this paper, we shall be concentrating on the four basic sources as highlighted by Matthews (2001). These are the environment, social, physiological and thoughts. The Environment – the environment can bombard you with intense and competing demands to adjust. Examples of environmental stressors include weather, noise, crowding, pollution, traffic, unsafe environment, and substandard housing, and crime. Social Stressors – we can experience multiple stressors arising from the demands of the different social role we occupy, such as parent, spouse, caregiver, and employee. Some examples of social stressors include deadlines, financial problems, job interviews, presentations, disagreements, presentations, disagreements demand for your time and attention loss of a loved one, divorce and co-parenting. Physiological – situation and circumstances affecting our body can be experienced as physiological stressors. Examples of physiological stressors include rapid growth of adolescence, menopause, illness, aging, giving birth, accidents, lack of exercise, poor nutrition, and sleep disturbances. Thoughts – your brain interprets and perceives situations as stressful, difficult, painful, or pleasant. Some situations in life are stress provoking, but it is our thought that determines whether they are a problem for us.

However, the level of stress a person experiences or encounters and perhaps the extent to which deleterious effect occurs depend on how well persons cope with the stressful situations. This could be because our susceptibility to stress and stress processes are mediated by social and psychological factors within the individual. Variations in individual's behaviour in the work place or perhaps what makes people involved in their duties has occupied the attention of psychologist, sociologist or managers alike. In a survey of 600 workers, Murphy (1995) reported that 46 percent of the subjects believed that their jobs were stressful and more than a quarter of them reported that their job constitute the greatest cause of stress in their lives. Landy, Quick & Karl (1994) noted that work related stress has been associated with increased worker injuries and psychological disorders and both depression and hostility (Motowildo, Packard, & Manning, 1986).

Cox (1988) defined stress as a "perceptual phenomenon arising from a comparison between the demand on the person and his ability to cope." The interaction model of stress discussed by Cox (1988) implies that varying demands (stressors) are made upon an individual in any situation, and these may be physical, emotional or environmental in nature. For a successful quality service rendering one needs an entire workforce that is motivated to participate actively in achieving quality improvement (Lam, 1995). As noted by McGrath (1970), an organism can be under loaded or overloaded. In case of overloading, there is the tendency for stress to occur. This reduces efficiency thereby giving room for stress to develop. Some other causes of stress are traumatic events, life events, chronic difficulties, role conflict, long working hours, persistent transfer, lack of support from supervisor in one's place of work, low interactional level between

workers and negligence of duties by co-workers.

Organizational stressors are intrinsic job factors (such as poor working conditions, workload), role in organizations (such as role conflict and role ambiguity), career development (such as lack of promotion policies, and job security, poor relationships at work), and organization culture (such as lack of participating in decision latitude) (Dua, 1994). As noted by Varca (1999), characteristics that describe the overall organization are viewed as part of the behaviour and reward system of the employees working in that setting. Organizational features such as policies and procedures, leadership style, operations and general contextual factors all have a profound effect on how employees view their organization.

The Herzberg's Two-Factor Theory (comprises two factors namely hygiene factors and motivational factors) was used as the theoretical framework for this study. Hygiene factors include salary, interpersonal relations with superiors, subordinates and peers, organization policies and administration, supervision, status, job security, working conditions, and personal life. Motivation factors on the other hand include achievement, recognition for achievement, advancement, responsibility, work itself and possibility of growth (Herzberg, 1968). This theory suggests that the presence of motivation factors can potentially create great motivation and greater job involvement. In the absence of motivators and hygiene factors, occupational stress often occurs.

In this study, stress is considered to be the person's response to environmental factors that create an imbalance. The imbalance may be manifested in many negative symptoms such as irritability, nervousness, short temper, excessive eating, increased alcohol intake and dissatisfaction. These of course are symptom that depicts negative stress. Certainly, stress can also produce positive symptoms such as increase readiness to tackle a challenging job or a commitment to stay with a job despite all odds. Individuals will not be persistent and effective in delivering quality of service if a revised organizational system is perceived as stressful (Varca, 1999). Therefore, an increase in job strain may lead to increased occupational stress, decreased organizational commitment, and eventually result in poor service delivery (Elizur & Koslowsky, 2001). However, the degree of stress experienced by different individuals in any single situation will vary due to personal factors Kendall, Murphy, O'Neill & Bursnall (2000). A review of job satisfaction indicates that working conditions, which help in attaining interesting work, reasonable workload, pay and promotions, and minimizing role conflict and ambiguity, will lead to job satisfaction (Lam, 1995). According to Kanungo (1982), job involvement is an individual's psychological identification or commitment to his / her job. People who are high in job involvement genuinely care for and are concerned about their work (Kanungo, 1982).

It is the degree to 'which one is cognitively preoccupied with, engaged in, and concerned with one's present job' (Paullay, Alliger, & Stone –Romero 1994). Psychologists have focused on job involvement which has attracted numerous studies. Job involvement is conducive not only to efficiency but also employees' self-fulfillment. Many organizations in Nigeria are facing serious challenges such as high dollar exchange rate, inflationary pressures, reduced budgets, and reduced employee output due to dearth of proficient workforce. With this reality, most organizations are battling to ensure they retain productive staff, provide a positive work environment and ensuring worker stability and better job involvement. This study therefore seeks to determine the influence of occupational stress on job involvement of workers in public and private organizations.

1.1 Study Objectives

This study is part of a larger one covering about thirty-three (33) organizations in Lagos State. The main aim of this study is to investigate the influence of occupational stress on job involvement of workers in public and private organizations. Apart from the main objective, this study hopes to determine the relationship between occupational stress among Nigerian workers in both public and private organizations.

1.2 Hypothesis

1. There is a significant influence of occupational stress and job involvement of workers in private and public organizations

2. METHOD

The design was a cross sectional survey. The study population comprised initially of 200 workers drawn from four public and private organizations, and the workers were from various departments ranging from the lowest cadre to the top management level, 180 workers finally took part in this study, To cater for variables such as age, gender, type of organization and cadre level among others, stratified and simple random sampling were employed. An informed consent documents was completed by each participants.

2.1 Instruments

A questionnaire consisting of two validated scales was used. The first part of the questionnaire dealt with participants socio-demographic details while the second part was divided into sections A and B. Section A has the Occupational Stress scale while section B measured Job Involvement.

2.1.1 Occupational Stress

Occupational stress was assessed using the Job-related Tension Index (JRTI; Kahn, Wolfe, Quinn, Snoek and Rosenthal (1964). The JRTI was designed to measure employee perceptions of job stress. The scale comprised of 15 items asking about the frequency of stressful events and the extent of role overload. Responses were obtained on a summated rating scale format ranging from "never" to "rather often". Higher scores indicated higher perceived occupational stress. Studies have shown reliability coefficients ranging from 0.67 - 0.72. However, the reliability test conducted on this scale for this study returned a coefficient of 0.87 which was considered adequate for the conduct of the study.

2.1.2 Job Involvement

Job involvement was measured by 12 items taken from the job involvement scale developed by Lodahl and Kejner (1965). Each item was measured on a five-point scale where a value of one corresponded to "Strongly Disagree" and a value of 5 corresponded to "Strongly Agree". The scores obtained on each of the 12 items were aggregated to produce a single score for job involvement. Brown (1996) on the basis of his meta-analytic study contends that the job involvement scale developed by Lodahl and Kejner (1965) is a reliable and useful measure of job involvement and as a result this scale was utilized to measure the construct of job involvement in the present study. The value of coefficient alpha for this sample was 0.85.

2.2 Procedure for Data Collection/Analysis

The questionnaire forms were administered to the participants with the aid of graduate students who were trained as research assistants. The questionnaires were administered and some were collected on the spot while others were retrieved later. One hundred and eighty forms were fit for statistical analyses, representing 90% response rate. The data were expressed as both descriptive and inferential statistics, such as frequency counts, percentages and t-test of independent samples. A p-value of ≤ 0.05 was considered significant. All statistical analyses were performed using IBM Software.

3. RESULTS

Table 1: Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants (N = 180)

Variables	Frequency	Percent
Gender		
Male	82	45.6
Female	98	54.4
Age		
21-25	39	21.7
26-30	72	40.0
31-40	38	21.1
41-50	17	9.4
51 and above	14	7.8
Marital Status		
Single	62	34.4
Married	99	55.0
Divorced/Separated	19	10.5
Type of Organization		
Public	89	49.4
Private	91	50.6

In Table 1, it was revealed that 180 workers were involved in the study. Eighty two (45.6%) were males and almost half of the participants (40%) were in the 26 to 30 years old category. Only 14 participants constituting 7.8% were 51 years and above. Despite the relatively young age of the participants, more than half (55%)

were married while 19 (10.5%) were divorced or separated. The distribution of participants by type of organization was almost proportional with the private organizations accounting for 50.6%

Table 2: Means, Standard Deviations and t-values of Participants on the influence of occupational stress on the job involvement of workers in private and public organizations

Organizations	N	Mean	SD	df	t	p
Private	91	17.07	5.34	178	.905	>.05
Public	89	16.46	3.40			

The data in Table 2 shows that there is no significant influence of occupational stress on the job involvement of workers in private and public organizations (t = .905, df = 178, p>.05)

4. DISCUSSION

Findings show that there is a significant difference in the influence of occupational stress and job involvement between private and public organizations. The result shows that both occupational stress and job involvement was higher among private organizations compared to public organizations. This result therefore accepts the research hypothesis, as it observed significant difference between the two sectors. Literature shows that public sector organization is assumed to operate in a different way than a private sector organization and by implication; the attitudes and behaviours of employees of those two types of organizations contrasts.

As noted by Perry and Rainey (1988), both types of organizations differ fundamentally in terms of their funding, ownership and mode of governance; the government agency/bureau is publicly funded and owned, while the for-profit enterprise/business firm is in private hands, privately funded and guided or 'controlled' by market forces. Becker and Connor (2005) in further alluding to the difference between public and private organizations posits that with length of tenure, public and private sector managers differ more on values. However, they reported that more similarities exist when younger managers from both sectors are compared but that older managers in both sectors share fewer similarities. Bogg and Cooper (1995) were more forceful. In their study, it was reported concerning occupational stress that compared to private sector managers, civil servants have worse mental and physical health. On job involvement, Rainey (1983) and Rainey & Chun (2005) reported no differences between public and private sector managers on job involvement.

5. CONCLUSION

Occupational stress has been of great concern to employees and other stakeholders of organizations. Occupational stress researchers agree that stress is a serious problem in many organizations (Cooper and Cartwright, 1994; Varca, 1999; Ornelas and Kleiner 2003). The cost of occupational stress is very high in many organizations in recent times. For instance, the International Labour Organisation (ILO) reports that inefficiencies arising from occupational may cost up to 10 percent of a country's GNP (Midgley, 1996). Occupational stress is caused by lack of resources and equipment; work schedules (such as working late or overtime and organizational climate are considered as contributors to employees stress. Occupational stress often shows high dissatisfaction among the employees, job mobility, burnout, poor work performance and less effective interpersonal relations at work (Manshor, Rodrigue, and Chong, 2003). To enhance involvement of workers and reduce occupational stress, there is need to create a positive work environment. It is suggested that the core concept of a healthy organization appears to lie in the redefinition and clarification of relationships, expectations, obligations and interaction between employees and the organization. Occupational stress is receiving a great deal of renewed attention due to its debilitating effects on workers' health and productivity. Extant literatures show that occupational stress has been extensively studied with a diverse population of subjects for well over fifty years. This is one of the few studies that actually examined the nexus between occupational stress and job involvement from the viewpoint of private and public sector organizations. This study concludes that occupational stress exerts strong influence on job involvement of workers in both private and public organizations.

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