

# MANAGING STRESS FOR EFFECTIVE SCHOOL SERVICE DELIVERY IN NIGERIAN HIGHER EDUCATION: A REALISTIC APPROACH

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## **Abstract**

*Stressors are enemies of cognitive activity and mental health. Stressors cause traumatic condition if not managed adequately especially among academics and students. Functional school service delivery can only be achievable if stress is effectively managed thereby empowering the individual for optimal performance in spirit, soul and body. This paper establishes the truth that unmanaged stress endangers students, professionals and social workers to unhealthy anxiety and denies them the ability to comfort situations realistically. Psychosocial Stressors and body debilitation have common relationship which can be affected by the veracity, nature and persistence of the Stressors as well as the individual's level of emotional intelligence (learned patterns of coping) and genetic makeup. This paper therefore, presents paradigms for managing stress and eliminating psychosocial Stressors in a view to achieving an improved institutional process in teaching and learning, research, community development and the much-talked-about entrepreneurial training in higher education in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Managing Stress, Effective, School Service Delivery, Higher Education.

Human beings live in a world that is full of limiting factors arising from psychological, behavioural, social, biological and cultural determinants. These factors are at the root of unfulfilled desires and expectations at work place, school and the family. In a much as man is born naturally with the tendency to be annoyed or afraid as he responds to environmental stimulus, if he fails to keep his internal system in a stable state in the face of changing environment, psychosocial crisis as well as stress become inevitable.

Claude (1961), reacting to the fore going premise, surmised that the maintenance of a stable life is critically determined by keeping our internal milieu constant in the face of use a changing environment. Psychologists refer to such a state as “homeostasis”, the term stress connotes the response or effects of anything that counter-balances homeostasis in a great dimension. Teacher and school administrators are known for exerting energy through long hours of talking, managing the classroom, conducting examinations, marking of scripts and recording the results. Without any doubts, the teacher or lecture tends to counter-balance his/her internal milieu while engaging in these activities. In school service delivery, most activities are co-ordinated and done by systematic use of the mind, lecturers, students and administrators are always marking maximum use of their minds in their daily activities towards the realization of the goals of the school. While they engage in such activities, stressors like anxiety, depression, forgetfulness and fear can set in if not managed adequately. The effects of job stress impacts on effectiveness in school service delivery and the efficacy of lectures and teachers in task performances just as its psychological influence could go beyond the school environment and nosedive into bad lifestyle habits like substance abuse and indiscriminate sexual activities which could result in debilitating health conditions. Job stress is a contemporary challenge for school workers in Nigeria most especially in higher institutions and increasing job stress has led to greater health costs, a higher percentage of absenteeism and turnover, more accidents and inefficient performance (Siu, 2003). Thus, job stress connotes work-related psychological stress, as well as an employee's capacity to cushion the effect of a certain situation or work environment.

### **The Concept of Stress**

The subject of stress has lent itself to series of eco-celestial debates among psychologists and sociologists. However, it is a known academic fact that without altercation between thesis and antithesis, there can't be an introduction of a synthesis which eventually culminates to a new thesis. Two schools of thought have emerged in a bid to defined stress. One group or school describes stress in terms of a causal factor (event or experience), the other school says it is the emotional response due to an event called stressor (effect).

To Lahey (2003), stress can be defined as any event or circumstance that strains or stretches an individual's ability to cope. In a similar vein, Reber and Reber (2001) submit that stress is any force that when applied to a system causes some severe change of its original form and brings it to a state of anarchy. The foregoing definitions perceive stress as the event or circumstance that encumbers the individual's ability thereby making him a subject to his/her tasks instead of being a boss over his/her task performances.

On the other hand, Santrock (2000:518) defined stress as “the response of individuals to the circumstances or events, called stressors, that threaten them and tax their coping abilities”. To him, stress is the response, which an individual makes when he is faced with circumstances or events referred to as stressors which strains his well-being and normal existence. Stress is therefore any unwholesome psychological state caused by some forms of debilitating pressures which subdues the natural ability of a person thereby rendering him helpless in the face of expected task performances. The mind of a man is his soul and that is the first point of call when stressors embark on rampage. The mind which is the instrument of academic work should therefore be preserved and protected from stressors.

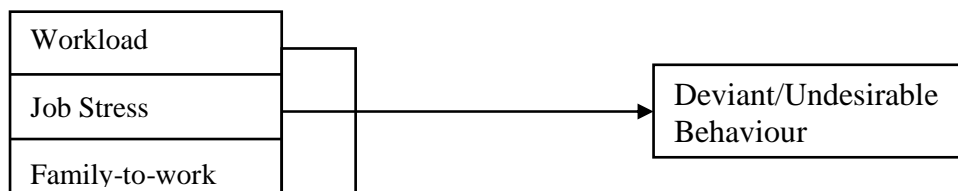
### **Job Stress and School Service Delivery**

Social workers like lecturers and teachers have been identified as being at risk of experiencing stress and work place burnout (Acker, 1999, Egan, 1993; Gilbar, 1998, Sze and Ivker, 1986, Urn and Harrison, 1998). The Higher institution is a peopled environment and it is client-based, with workers and students being in complex social relationships. In this kind of situation, the environment turns to be a highly compulsive ecological system where personality clashes and conflicts are common place.

Job stress refers to as a ‘soulish’ experience that is connected with strain, anxiety and tension that originates from workload in a job or occupation (Cooke and Rousseau, 1984). According to the findings of a study by Omar and Associates in 2011 in public organization in Malaysia, it was revealed that among 162 employees from a public organization in Malaysia, there is a positive relationship between job stress and deviant workplace behaviour. In this study, employees who experienced negative emotions such as frustration and irritation due to work-related stress were more prone to exhibit deviant behaviours at their workplace. The school especially the Higher Institution is a client-based organization and until the expectations of the clients and educational subscribers are satisfied by the school administrators, there cannot be effective school service delivery. Unsatisfactory school service delivery occurs due to lecturers’ and teachers’ reaction to job stress and other factors that can induce negative emotions. Other studies have also shown that job stress is a major factor that causes several forms of deviant behaviour and among the forms of

undesirable behaviours are absenteeism, alcoholism, substance abuse, low job motivation and low productivity (Safaria et al, 2010).

Based on the stress theory, Radzali, Ahmad and Omar (2013) have developed a model on the influence of stress factors on undesirable workplace behaviour as seen below;



**Figure 1:** The Influence of Stress Factors on Deviant Workplace Behaviour. Culled from Radzali, Ahmad and Omar (2013).

### Some Causes of Stress

Kets de vries (1979) presented the factors that cause stress as stressors. He emphasized that stress variables are many and include the following:

- **Individual Stressors:** According to him, these are personal characteristics and life career stages, role stressors such as conflicts, ambiguity, work-overload and work underload.
- **Group Stressors:** These connote lack of group cohesiveness, lack of social support, interpersonal and intergroup conflicts.
- **Organizational Stressors:** These relate to conflicting policies, ill-defined responsibilities and authority, poor physical working conditions and fault processes.
- **Extra - Organizational Stressors:** These are associated with societal and technological changes, family situation, relaxation problems, hard/harsh financial times, race and class discrimination and poor residential conditions.

Similarly, Cooper and Marshal (1978) identified six major causes of stress as follow; factors intrinsic to the job, role stress (conflicts), relationship at work, career stress (for example job insecurity, under promotion etc.), organizational structure and climate and interface between work and home. The causes of stress sequel to the foregoing, are encapsulated into intrinsic (biological/genetic) and extrinsic (social environmental) factors.

## **Understanding Family-To-Workplace Conflict and School Service Delivery**

When familial pressures from the home domains and workplace task performance become mutually incompatible in some respect, family-to-workplace conflict manifests. That is participation in the workplace task performances is made more difficult by virtue of participation in the family task performances (Greenhouse and Bentell, 1985). Most times employees are faced with demands or situations in the household domain which interfered with work domain such as the presence of young children and elder care responsibilities and unsupportive family members. Employees experiencing family-to-work conflict may be prone to severe stress condition which is capable of pushing them to service deviance. The high institutions suffer numerous dimensions of family-to-work conflict among students and lecturers. To Radzali, Ahmad and Omar (2013), there are two reasons for this. Firstly, the pressure inherent in conflict drains the employee's resources such as energy and concentration needed to engage in work productively, and hence, he or she 'slacks off' at work. Secondly, the experience of the conflict may prompt an employee to look for opportunities for self-defense and replenishment of the resources lost. Hobfoll (2001) stated that one of those resources which an employee may seek to protect is the feeling of having control over his or her life.

Due to time pressure an employee who is unable to meet family expectations is prone to leave work early (even without permission) to fulfill family expectations and responsibilities. The above situations may result in low productivity by the employee and the expectations of organizational clients remain unfulfilled.

### **Coping/Stress Management Strategies**

There are stress management strategies that have been developed by psychologists to empower employees to cope effectively with stress conditions. These coping strategies have been developed in a manner that employees will engage them as psychological human defense mechanism against stressors and stress condition as it were. Newman and Beecher (1979), after an extensive of several psychoanalytical literatures, were able to unveil adaptive responses to stress in form of strategies which individuals, organizations and schools could use to cope with stress. They can be seen below;

- Personal strategies which include mediation, psychological withdrawal, planning ahead, developing a personal philosophy of life, physical fitness and balanced-diet, behaviour modification, social support and self-diagnosis.
- **Organizational Strategies:** These have to do with changes in the organizational structure, changes in selection, placement training and development policies, change in the socialization processes, educating managers in human

relations, developing and monitoring the health of employees, redesign jobs and reduce overload and give more responsibility if underloaded and restrict travel.

- Social strategies include improving physical infrastructures, maintaining stable government, reducing unemployment, reducing crime waves, creating attractive environment, promoting economic and social development.

Similarly, Amadi (2011) presented other coping strategies as follow:

- **Ministering Strength to Yourself:** Everybody knows himself or herself better than someone else. Words are very powerful when an individual uses them to encourage himself or herself in stress conditions. Optimistic people have always had the cause to tell themselves, “I can still make it”, “winners don’t quit and quitters never win”. With these words, the person's stress is either reduced or totally eliminated because positive statements carry supernatural force which can subdue elemental forces such as stress and burnout.
- **Attention Diversion Strategy:** According to this model, it is agreed that “whatsoever you focus your mind on, has power to control your life, but whatsoever you ignore is bound to submit to your power”. Through this means, the stress emanating from the circumstance (stressor) will be drastically reduced.
- **Problem Solving Strategy:** This strategy is the pragmatist paradigm for confronting both stress and stressors. It lays much emphasis on marshalling out ways to solve the problem. It involves understanding the stressor, its effects, solutions to the problem and then work out appropriate strategies to resolve it.

## Conclusion

Owing to the fact that stress is part and parcel of human existence, we are left with no other option than to find ways to manage and cope with it. Human beings are endowed with an intrinsic celestial instinct to control and tame their environment (environmental possibilism). This goes to say that any individual who is unable to guard and effectively utilize this virtue will end up as victim of emotional anarchy in every day relationship with people. Coping with stress becomes imperative in school service delivery in order to effectively actualize the vision and mission of the educational system as well as satisfy the expectations of clients and subscribers.

## Suggestions

- The leadership approach of school administrators such as the vice chancellor, rector, provost or the principal should be one that carries human face (e.g. the democratic leadership technique).

- The Higher institutions should establish counseling units with trained counselors who could assist in promoting responsible attitudes toward the sustenance of good health and sound mental balance.
- The employers in schools should employ more capable hands in order to reduce the problem of work overload in school service delivery and seminars and workshops should be organized to educate the management and staff on the danger of stress in organizations.
- There should be provision of adequate recreational facilities. Some of the strategies used to avoid or manage stress are to relax, do exercise and sublimate, sporting facilities, flower gardens and clubs can be of great help in students' stress management as well as lecturers.

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