

**IMPACT OF JOB STRESS ON WELLBEING OF EMPLOYEES AND ITS IMPLICATION FOR COUNSELLING****YAYA UM**

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**ABSTRACT**

Job Stress comes as a result of incongruity between an employee and his job. This brings about psychological and physiological changes in the life of the worker, thus it, affects his/her general wellbeing and productivity. This article focused on the impact of job-related stress on the wellbeing of employees and the role of counselling in its prevention and management. The paper talked about the concepts of stress, job stress, causes, signs and symptoms, adverse effects and prevalence rate of job-related stress on employees. Lastly, the article presented empirical findings, such as counselling employees on how to cope with psychological distress and adverse effect of psychological trauma, which improve wellbeing of workers.

**KEYWORDS :** Stress, Job Stress, Employees, Counselling.**INTRODUCTION**

The dictionary of behavioural sciences defines stress as the reaction to physical injury, violence, severe losses, danger and separation, among others. <sup>1</sup>Stress is a response of an individual to a perceived or encountered threat or demand, which is beyond his/her ability to handle. Stress causes unpleasant emotional and physiological changes in a person, thus resulting in mental and physical illness. However, stress is not entirely negative, (it demoralizes and reduces the performance of a person, to the extent that the person becomes depressed and aggressive), it also has a positive impact on a person; (it alerts him/her on danger and prepares him to face it squarely). Stress is caused by inevitable events (hassles and tussles) in the environment that are called stressors. These stressors are found in many places like homes, schools, working places, hospitals, prisons and others<sup>2</sup> This paper focused on the impact of job-related

stress on the psychological wellbeing of employees, and it also looked at the role of counsellors in the prevention and management of job-related stress.

**CONCEPT OF STRESS**

Etymologically, the word stress was derived from the Latin word "stingere", which means to draw tight; it is regarded as a force that pushes physical or psychological factors beyond the range of stability, therefore, producing strain in an individual.<sup>3</sup> The concept of stress is new, but widely found in every place. However, the definition of stress among scholars varies and it depends on how they perceived it. That is to say, the wider the usage of the term 'stress', the more elusive is its meaning.

Modern definitions of stress recognised that, it is a personal experience caused by pressure or demands on an individual and impacts on the individual's ability to cope or his/her perception of that ability.<sup>4</sup>

Snerberg,<sup>5</sup> cited that "stress is a physiological unitary response of all organisms to environmental agents." Twinning,<sup>6</sup> defines stress as a force (stressor) applied to a system or structure that causes changes.

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It implies a situation or circumstance that threatens or believed to threaten a person's functions or ability to cope.

According to Dhawan,<sup>7</sup> stress is the reaction of mind and body to environmental changes, in other words, it is the bad feelings that an individual will experience because of difficulties beyond his control. Stress has been defined by Cox in Cope,<sup>8</sup> as a complex psychological state that arises from the person's cognitive appraisal of adaptation to demands or threats. He further, highlighted four processes of cognitive appraisal, which are:

1. Demands on a person
2. Individual characteristic, skills, and ability to meet up with the demands (Personal Resources).
3. Constraints when coping with the demands of stress.
4. Supports received from others.

However, Coetzee & Rothmann<sup>9</sup> found conflicts on the views of many scholars about the definition of stress, and these can be categorized by into three: stimulus, response, and interactional definitions. Stimulus-based definition views stress as a situational- or environmental-based stimulus that causes harm on a person, response-based definition defines it as an individual's psychological or physiological response to environmental forces, and the interactional definition, asserts that, stress is both a stimulus (stressors) and a response (outcome of manifestation of stress and strain) to particular situation or events.

### CAUSES OF STRESS

Stress is caused by unavoidable events in the (hassles and tussles) environment that are called stressors, they vary from one person to another and the circumstances differ, for instance, some people find horse riding or travelling to be stressful, but others find it as joyful. For an event to be a stressor the person has to appraise it as a threat or something beyond his/her control.

The causes of stress can be categorised into three:

1. Disasters: These are natural calamities that cause death and loss of property in the affect area, and claim lives and property. The victims often suffer serious emotional anguish. Examples of these disasters include earthquakes, fire, tsunami tornadoes and flood etc.
2. Life changes: As life goes on, we experience many changes (be it positive or negative), and these changes are stressful and they pose serious challenges to human life, for instance marriage, losing a job, divorce, death of a spouse, et cetera, are the typical examples of life changes.
3. Daily Struggle: In our daily routine we face many hindering factors that are in the real sense stressful, among these are, insecurity, competition, hostility, frustration impatience etc.<sup>10</sup>

### SIGNS AND SYMPTOMS OF STRESS

The signs and symptoms are divided into two: emotional (anger, crying, shouting depression restlessness etc) and physical (alcohol and substance abuse, poor sleep loss of appetite, nail biting, dizziness and stomach upset etc).<sup>10</sup>

### PREVALENCE OF STRESS

In a study conducted by North-Western National life at United State of America, 40% of the workers reported that their jobs were very extremely stressful (National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, NIOSH).<sup>10</sup> However, in Nigeria, studies conducted on job stress and satisfaction among employees in different settings reported high relationships between prevalence of job stress and job satisfaction<sup>11-14</sup>

### CONCEPT OF JOB STRESS

The term "Job Stress" used interchangeably with "Work Stress" and "Occupational Stress" is often used to describe an area of study focusing on psycho-social aspects of work that are detrimental to workers' health. In other words, job stress refers to the harmful physical

and emotional responses that occur when the requirement of the job fails to match the capabilities, resources and needs of a worker or employee.<sup>15</sup> Lazarus & Folkman's cognitive/transactional model cited by Workcover,<sup>16</sup> described job stress as a process that involves transaction between an individual and his or her work environment. Job stress can be described as a dynamic and reciprocal relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as being taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endanger his or her well-being<sup>17</sup>

In USA, National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health, defined job related stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when job requirements do not match the worker's capabilities, resources, and needs<sup>18</sup>. Another definition by Ibem, Anosike, and Azuh & Mosaku,<sup>19</sup> emphasized that job stress is a physical and emotional response that occurs when workers perceived an imbalance between job demands and capacity to meet such demands. Kyriacou cited by Arokoyo,<sup>20</sup> also defined job-related stress as the experience of negative emotional states, attributed to work-related factors, in which the outcomes are costly to the individual and the organization.

### **RISK FACTORS ASSOCIATED WITH JOB RELATED STRESS**

Health Safety Executive,<sup>21</sup> identified seven broad categories of risk factors for job-related stress;

1. Cultural Issues, which include lack of positive response to stress or health concerns, lack of staff involvement, poor communication, lack of consultation and participation in decision making, and long work hours or lack of rest/breaks.
2. Demands, such as challenge and pressure, exposure to violence or aggression, work overload, poor physical environment, lack of training, lone working, and fast pace of work.
3. Control Issues, which presents as low level or lack of control over task design, or non-participation in decision making.

4. Relationships with co-workers which include; bullying and harassment, lack of support for the employee and physical violence.

5. Change, in the last few years many people recognize change as a stressful factor. These changes include changing market demands, new technology, and organizational restructuring.

6. Conflicts and ambiguity roles of individuals in an organization.

7. Support, training and individual factors, these include lack of adequate training, mismatch between a person and his/her job, lack of support or feedback, and lack of constructive advice.

### **IMPACT OF JOB STRESS ON EMPLOYEE**

Job stress has various impacts on the individual employees; Butt<sup>22</sup> classified them into physical, psychological and behavioural impacts. These impacts could be detrimental to both employees and the organization they work for, cause ailments to the employees and bankruptcy to the organization<sup>8</sup>

### **PHYSIOLOGICAL EFFECTS OF STRESS**

Employees who report that they are stressed incur healthcare costs that are 46 % higher than those that were non-stressed employees,<sup>23</sup> and 60 to 90 % of Visits to doctors were attributed to stress-related illnesses and symptoms. If it is left untreated, prolonged stress raises the risk for developing chronic and costly-diseases. The chronic and costly diseases include heart disease, diabetes and cancers, which collectively account for high cost of healthcare in USA. Diabetes alone cost business \$58 billion in 2007 in just indirect medical expenses such as 15 million work days lost to absenteeism and 120 million work days with reduced productivity. Stress can also lower the immune system and play a role in a person's susceptibility to more colds, flu and other infectious diseases. Additionally, people who are stressed are more likely to experience pain-related conditions, and a host of other ailments, from teeth grinding and chest tightness to fatigue<sup>24</sup>



Similarly, Luminari Landmark Study, cited by health advocates,<sup>24</sup> found that people who work under stressful conditions such as work/life conflicts or lack of social support, autonomy and control, are about twice as likely to experience the following physical and mental effects as other workers not stressed:

1. Heart and cardiovascular problems
2. Anxiety, depression and demoralization
3. Substance abuse
4. Certain cancers
5. Infectious diseases
6. Conflicts/ Injuries
7. Back pain

Osipow and Davis, cited in Teye,<sup>25</sup> added that the physical effects of stress include physical illness or poor self-care habits, which the individual may exhibit. Physical stress may include the manifestation of psychogenic-based disorders, which may have cardiovascular and other health implications. Other indications of physical effects of job stress include sleep and eating disorders and substance abuse. Objective indices have been used to measure physiological stresses thought to be precursors of diseases, such as, cardiovascular symptoms (elevated blood pressure and high cholesterol level) and biochemical symptoms (e.g. increased uric acid and cortisol levels).

### PSYCHOLOGICAL IMPACTS OF JOB STRESS

Butt,<sup>22</sup> described job stress as a daily encounter, and the stress comes and goes without leaving any enduring imprints, but when stress is severe and piles up it affects the person's psychological functions. Stress has an obvious effect on an individual's psychological wellbeing. There is evidence that stress has unenthusiastic implications for organizations and individual workers. According to Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, in Butt,<sup>22</sup> workers are more likely to experience a range of negative endings (health problems, mental complaints and physical problems) after stress. In addition, Cope,<sup>8</sup> identified four symptoms

of psychological effects of job stress on an individual employee:

1. Subjective symptoms (such as anxiety, depression, irritation, anger and loss of temper, frustration, low self-esteem, nervousness and apathy)
2. Cognitive symptoms (e.g., inability to make decisions, poor concentration, short Attention span, hypersensitivity and thought block)
3. Worrying and neurosis about work (continuity of organisation, relations with others and an individual's level of competence)
4. Behavioural symptoms of psychological strain, which can cause detrimental physical effects, (e.g., alcoholism, drug abuse, emotional outbursts, excessive eating, excessive smoking and impulsive behaviour).

### BEHAVIOURAL IMPACTS OF JOB STRESS

Butt,<sup>22</sup> cited by Tucker-Ladd, explained the common behavioural-effects of occupational or job stress, include hyperactivity, eruption of emotions, worry in specific situation, compulsive thoughts, holding a complaint, excessive perturbing, touchiness, excessive sleeping, poor reminiscence, feeling frightened and impatience. Some workers face problems such as lack of social hold up, scepticism, exposure to life threatening risks. These people take safety and security measures to protect themselves, which add to their increased levels of stress.

### JOB STRESS AND ITS IMPLICATIONS FOR COUNSELLING

Counselling is a professional relationship between a trained counsellor and a client; the relationship is usually between two persons or sometimes between a person and a group. It is aimed at helping clients understand and clarify views about their lives, that will help them achieve their self-determined goals, through meaningful well-informed choices and resolutions of emotional or inter-personal problems. Burks & Staffire,<sup>26</sup> noted that when the performance and productivity of an organization or its employees decline, the thought of providing formal counselling for





both employer and the employees begins, it helps them resolve job-related stress, job dissatisfaction, which in turn improves their wellbeing and productivity. Counselling at a working place is provided in two ways; internally and externally, it is internal when the organization hires a trained person to provide such an important Employee Assistant Service (EAS) or external when the service is contracted out to a consultant.

However, the results of a study,<sup>2</sup> found the following implications for counselling in the management of job related stress:

1. Counsellors in working places should channel their counselling programs to help the managers understand the importance of motivating employees through salaries, bonuses, awards and promotions for career development.
2. Counsellors should educate employees on how to cope with psychological distress and the adverse effect of psychological trauma.

3. Counsellors should sensitize employees to appreciate the value and dignity of labour, and understand and adapt to their work and working environment.

4. Counsellors should instil in the mind of employees, the importance of putting a career in a specific job.

5. Counsellors should steer the counselling, in such a way that it will instil ethical principles in the minds of the employees.

### CONCLUSION

Job-related stress comes because of incongruity between workers and their jobs. This in turn has adverse effects on the physical and psychological wellbeing of the workers. However, counselling plays a great role in its prevention and management, such that, workers are motivated and educated to cope with the stressors. ■

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**Cite this article as:** Yaya UM

Impact of Job Stress On Wellbeing of Employees And Its Implication For Counselling  
*Bo Med J* 2015; 12(2): 108 - 113. **Source of Support:** Nil, **Conflict of Interest:** None declared.

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