

Stress Management By Library And Information Science Professionals In Nigerian University Libraries

BY

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Abstract

Job stress is an uncomfortable condition resulting from a person's interpretation to threatening events or circumstances. It exists in almost every working and living environments. The study used survey method of research and selected samples from professional librarians working in Nigerian university libraries. It was established by the study that stress in Nigerian university libraries is a reality. But the study has not been able to establish any serious consequences of stress on the job performance of the librarians.

The study concluded that stress in Nigerian university libraries is the byproduct of the difficulties encountered by the librarians in performing their duties and responsibilities. However, to reduce stress the work processes in library should be made simple and easy to handle. Library management should support the librarians by designing work processes that could help the librarians to overcome their frustrations and stress.

Introduction

Job stress is produced from lack of regards for physiological, psychological, and psychosocial comfort from the equipment use in working, relationships, and other considerations that can be found in the working environment. Comfort is achieved when a person neither feels nor show any sign of fatigue or stress. Library and information professionals have multiplicity of roles to perform and this could make the librarians experience fatigue. Special Library Association (2008) identified the roles of librarians to include development and maintenance of a portfolio of cost-effective, client-valued information services that are aligned with the strategic directions of the organization and client groups. Building a dynamic collection of information resources based on a deep understanding of clients' information needs. Gathering evidence to support decisions about the development of information services and products and maintaining current awareness of emerging technologies. Others are assessing and communicating the value of the information organization, including information services, products and policies to senior management, key stakeholders and client groups contributing effectively to senior management strategies and decisions regarding information applications, tools and technologies, and policies for the organization.

Efforts to tackle job stress and other occupational related problems among Nigerian workers began since the last five decades. This is evident in the ILO report (1969) where it was mentioned that the government of Nigeria requested the International labor office for assistance on measures to improve occupational health conditions of workers in the country. Hence, it was inline with this effort that a consultant was commissioned in 1968 to undertake

a study on the issue. The commission was set up to survey the prevailing working conditions in the country and to evaluate occupational health problems and services. In the end, the commission advised the government on development of occupational health services, medical inspection of factories and work places. It also recommended safety measures against occupational related problems. To make this known the commission encouraged the government to organize the first seminar on the subject. The seminar was titled "International seminar on occupational health in developing countries." It was this same seminar that set the final stage on addressing the concern for the effects of stress and working conditions on workers in the country.

Indeed, librarians have many roles to perform in the library and any of the roles could be stressful as every task in the library needs to be executed while considering the human factor in undertaking it. The human factor considers the abilities of the worker in carrying out task. Therefore, any work conditions that do not recognizes the abilities, capabilities and needs of the worker could result in stress.

Review of related literature

Harper (2000) noted that stress is not an illness in itself, but rather; a maladaptive response to pressure. Thus the word stress may be used as an umbrella term covering all of an employee's physical and emotional problems. Despite their steadfastly conservative image, there is no reason to suppose that librarians are less susceptible to such problems than other professionals. Of course; all librarians and information workers suffer temporary frustrations at work. In order to take stress - or techno stress - seriously, these problems

must have been encountered over a period of time. It is viewed that events or circumstances must be interpreted as threats to the wellbeing or must be perceived as such. It also means that stress needs to be responded to appropriately as events or conditions interpreted as producing uncomfortable feelings affect the individual in the attainment of his goals or discharge of his responsibilities. For instance, the feeling of being stressed may be associated with performing tasks that have deadlines to meet, or having a busy schedule with no time for rest, or having little time to finish a given task, or receiving bad recommendation from superiors, and or having an argument with a friend. These circumstances could be interpreted as stress because they produce uncomfortable feeling and are threatening the individual in achieving target at work.

In another study Routray and Kumar (2008) and Siamian ...et al (2006) linked stress to the changes which our bodies experience as we adjust to our continually changing environment. Stress is an integral part of our daily life since prehistoric times and Library and Information science personnel are not exception to this. We cannot avoid stress in our life; rather the best policy is to manage it properly to increase our efficiency. They argued that, the causes of stress include the constant challenges in working environments. This is particularly true for Library and information professionals not only because of the role they play inside their libraries but because users' expectations always seem to exceed library's capacity in terms of documents, infrastructure facilities, finance, staff etc. It is simply not possible to remove all sources of stress in the digital library workplace but, the library managers can manage stress among their team. This will help to reduce some of its consequences, such as: poor morale, reduced performance and team conflict. Stress can be managed through creating supportive culture; appreciate people's differences; recognize the signs of stress; resolve issues as they arise; consider teambuilding; enable autonomy; and have a contingency plan.

Huczynski and Buchanan (1991) observed that the use of information and communication technology (ICT) could be associated with stress. "Workers who work with ICTS frequently express frustrations and concern whenever their system failed to give the instant information requested. Constant computer breakdowns and interruption of work are normal with the use of ICTS." Therefore, stress could occur when the individual operator is blocked from attaining his goals. Moreover, an employee trying to finish a piece of work before the close of the day may be frustrated by any interruption or breakdown.

Neville (1981) remarked that the problem of stress in university libraries is generally the result of environmental inconsistencies and nature of the task being performed by the librarians at each section of the library. Librarians in public services areas normally complain more about stress than librarians in technical and other services areas in the library. Similarly, such conditions as ventilation, lightings, use of technology, and leadership styles of library managers add to the stress encountered by librarians. The inconsistencies in the environment of the library is mostly seen when the realities on the ground do not match with the expectations of the librarians. This calls for advance information to prospective librarians to acquaint them with the realities of working in the library.

It has been generally accepted that studies on job stress among librarians in university libraries could help library managers understand the constraints in the way of librarians, design work system, and place each librarian on task that he can perform better. Indeed, the capacity of the librarians to provide service to the academic community in the university will improve from the use of appropriate management style that utilizes information studies on work related problems such as stress.

Methodology

The study surveyed librarians in Nigerian University Libraries to determine the prevalence of stress in Nigerian University Libraries. Librarians working in the libraries were used as subjects. However, in order to ensure the selection of a representative sample, members of the sample were drawn only from the professional librarians' cadre taking note of their geographical spread throughout the country. The unit of the population from where samples were drawn was identified as a true reflection of the population. The instruments used for data collection in the study were questionnaire and interview. These are relevant in a survey study which normally involves large group or scattered population.

Result and analysis

The researcher distributed 360 copies of questionnaire in 12 university libraries in the six (6) geo-political zones of Nigeria. Out of this number 249(69.16%) were returned duly completed representing 69.16% which is considered adequate for meaningful analysis. It is difficult in a survey of this nature to obtain hundred percent (100%) return of questionnaire as not all the respondents may give their response. Therefore, it is the belief of the researcher that 69.16% response rate can give reasonable representation of data to reach conclusion in the study.

Common causes of stress among librarians in university libraries

There are many causes of stress in Nigerian university libraries as observed by the study. Some of the causes have been observed to be severe while others are not but both have been observed to be producing negative or uncomfortable feelings among the librarians. Some stresses have been observed to be linked directly to the tasks librarians

From table 1 below the most prevalent cause of stress is attitude of users which records 10.84% (27) response rates. The attitude of the users perhaps relates to the behavior of the users towards the librarians as some users used foul and abusive language against the personality of the librarians. This could perhaps be responsible for most of the frustrations and anger suffered by the librarians as a result of dealing with the users. Indeed, frustrations and anger could be associated with the experience of stress as they could push a person to reach the outer limits of his tolerance. This corroborate the earlier finding where reader services/circulation was discovered to be the most difficult task due to the attitude of the users to the librarians which results in stress. The implication of this finding is that for librarians to be free from the stress arising from the interaction with library users certain conditions which will prevent the users from passing complimentary remarks must be

perform while others are personal relating to relationships, financial difficulties, problems with spouses or children, etc. The work related causes relates to the problems encountered while performing the work and the personal causes relates to the personal problems of the librarians which are all influencing the attitude of the librarians to work.

removed. Dual role of tending the family versus paid work recorded by 7.23% librarians is a personal problem which is causing stress among married couples. However, as observed, this is the least cause of stress among the respondents as recorded by 4.02% librarians.

The above implies that university librarians need to resolve stress from the library environment to improve the productivity and efficiency of the librarians. In order to protect the librarians from stress an inventory of the sources of stress in the library could be taken to obtain information on what constitutes stress on the librarians with a view to correcting them or removing them away from the librarians. Librarians should be the best people to undertake such activity as they know their environment and also know what constitute stress in their work places better than any other person.

Table 1: Common causes of stress among librarians in Nigerian university Libraries

CAUSE OF STRESS	FREQ	%
Attitude of users	27	10.84
Lack of promotion / advancement	21	8.43
Lack of adequate remuneration	18	7.23
Dual role of family responsibility vs. paid work	18	7.23
Work over load	17	6.83
Death of a spouse or loved one	17	6.83
Financial problem	17	6.43
Time pressure / deadline	12	4.82
Work under load	14	5.62
Illness	14	5.62
Pregnancy	14	5.62
Bad relation with colleagues	10	4.02
Bad relation with superiors	10	4.02
Marital problem	10	4.02
Leadership styles of the chief librarian	8	3.21
Lack of information sources to process	7	2.81
Lack of feedback as work is performed	5	2.00
Lack of control in work pattern	4	1.61
Lack of adequate working space	4	1.61
Lack of job satisfaction	3	1.20
Total	249	100

Periods and duration of stress occurrence among librarians in Nigerian university libraries

The period of stress occurrence refers to the time of the day in which stress occurs or happens. The duration of stress refers to the time taken to get out of stress. It has been observed that librarians working in Nigerian university. Libraries work for 8 hours a day between 8.00am to 4.00pm. Table 2 below indicates the period and duration of stress occurrence among the librarians in Nigerian university libraries.

Consequences of stress on job performance of librarians in Nigerian university libraries

Consequences refer to the effects being produced by stress on the librarians and which is causing harm to the librarians. Such consequences may include fatigue, headache, eye strain, muscle pain, hypertension, etc The data presented from the responses of the librarians in table 3 below, show that stress does not affect the job performance of the librarians. The data show that (169) 67.87% of the librarians indicated that they noticed no change in their task performance. This means that even though librarians experience stress, it is not affecting their task performance. This perhaps could be because the librarians are able to overcome the stress they experienced from their work places

This finding corroborate the earlier findings by Owushi and Meggison (2000) where they revealed or a long time and cope poorly; may become irritable, sociably withdrawn and emotionally unstable. Librarians in such conditions could have difficulty in concentrating and in solving problems because of stress. The librarians could also suffer anxiety disorders, depression or severe emotional disorders and could be emotionally numbed and easily angered or startled.

The implication of this finding is that though stress is not producing any noticeable effect on the librarians, it could be affecting the services of the library since it is present within the library environment. Moreover continuous exposure to stress could produce long lasting effects on the

that librarians do not allow their personal needs to be in conflict with their work. This means that the librarians do not allow pressure and stress to influence their job performance. It also means that the librarians are able to control the effects of pressure and other factors causing stress from their working environment. Hence librarians do not suffer from any consequence as a result of stress encountered from their working environment.

Analyzing the responses of the librarians on the consequences of stress on them, table 4 above indicates that there is no serious implication of stress on the health of the librarians as they did not contract any disease or ailment due to stress. Perhaps it could be concluded from the study that of those librarians who indicated contracting any problem may be due to natural cause or old age or any other personal problem of the staff.

Simon (2003) asserted that stress could affect men who have low control over the demands of their jobs. Thus, men are more likely to die from heart problem than men with more control over their work. Men who experienced low level of social support from their co-workers are 2.6 times more likely to suffer cardiovascular disorders and death from stress. Auerbach and Gramling (2003) confirmed this finding where they stated that stress influences mental health as well as physical health. That people who experienced high level of stress f

librarians which will later affect their health. Any exposure to stress may affect the library staff to make them ineffective and inefficient in assigned roles. Therefore, if the library is to be an effective instrument of scholarship in providing efficient instruction and learning services to its user's, effects of stress on the librarians are suppose to be identified and eliminated before they cause harm on their job performance and on their health. Any stress related disorder is suppose to be taken seriously and treated with urgency before it causes harm on the librarians.

Table 2: Periods of stress among librarians in Nigerian university libraries

TIME OF THE DAY	DURATION							
	10 – 19 mins.		20 – 29 mins.		30 – 39 mins		Above 40 mins.	
	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%	Freq	%
12 - 2 pm	46	19	12	5	22	9	7	3
2 - 4 pm	26	11	65	27	50	21	12	5

Table 3: Consequences of stress on job performance of the librarians

CONSEQUENCES OF STRESS	FREQ	%
No change in performance	169	67.87
Unable to work	35	14.06
Absent from work	22	8.84
Late to work	11	4.42
Unable for full days work	9	3.61
Break work to rest	3	1.20
Total	249	100

Table 5: Methods Used by Librarians to cope with or handle stress

METHOD /TECHNIQUE	Freq.	%
Develop interest in clientele	23	9.24
Develop consideration for others	21	8.43
Develop interest in work	21	8.43
Direct attention away from source of stress	20	8.03
Maintain life within tolerable limits	19	7.63
Remove source of stress	19	7.63
Talk about the problem with others	18	7.23
Learn to do things one after the other	16	6.43
Cooperate with all in the library	15	6.02
Change to task that allow your mind to wonder	15	6.02
Build good relationship with superiors	14	5.62
Compartmentalize work and home life	13	5.22
Engage in hobbies or leisure activities	11	4.42
Engage in sports or physical exercise	9	3.61
Plan time	5	2.00
Rest to take a nap	4	1.61
Seek for counseling	3	1.20
Take vacation	3	1.20
Total	249	100

Methods of coping with stress among librarians in Nigerian university libraries

Individuals can cope with stress by using thoughts and actions to deal with stress or to lower the level of stress. In this study various methods or techniques have been identified to be used by librarians working in university library in Nigeria to cope with stress. The methods identified are presented in table 5 above. From the above table tasks the study identified 18 methods used by librarians to cope with stress. The most common of the methods used by librarians is to develop interest in clientele, with response rate of 9.24% (23); this corroborates with the earlier finding in the study that the common cause of stress is attitude of users. Indeed, without developing interest in the work and on the clientele the librarians serve; librarians may not be able to serve their users effectively. Moreover librarians are required to serve their clientele without reservation. Interest in work among the librarians could help the librarians to move the library forward in information provision to the members of the academic community within the universities. The least method used by the librarians to cope with stress is taking a vacation with response rate of 1.20% (3) as indicated in the table. However, this method could not have been the best method to counter stress because being away from a problem may not mean that the problem itself is solved. The problem could still be there even when one resumes work after the vacation. Therefore it best to stay on to tackle the problem head on with a view to solving it once and for all.

The above finding is in sharp contrast with that of Owushi and Meggison (2000) in which they found out that strolling around the library is a common method used by the librarians to reduce stress. This form of exercise relaxes tension and anxiety originating from stress. It is interesting to note that whichever method is adopted by the librarians in coping with stress, it should be that could solve the problem as rightly observed by Auerbach and Gramling (2003:6) where they note that solving stress requires the individual to adopt a method that should remove the effects of stress or reduce it to a bearable limit on the person. Any method that can be used by the librarians to counter stress could be directed at the problem causing the stress or at the moderation or elimination of the experiences causing the stress. Perhaps if librarians were to use variety of methods in managing or countering stress they would not have to worry about stress as it could have been eliminated completely from the library.

Indeed, there is no one single method the librarians could use to cope or counter stress and pressure of work. Every librarian can use the method he can handle it best, which is at his disposal and is appropriate to the situation. The important thing is that, the method used must be the one that could

solve the problem of stress as any failure could be dangerous to the health and wellbeing of the librarians. However, in order to control stress effectively the library management needs to provide resources on training and education on stress management practices.

Conclusion

Stress in university libraries relates to the difficulties encountered by the librarians in task performance. Though some tasks in the library do not require much physical and mental effort to perform but they could cause stress. Stress comes from external sources such as the users who are the main beneficiary of the library. Library users have the tendency to undermine the ability of the librarians by their actions which could undermine the librarians. This causes the librarians to be angry or feel harassed and frustrated which in the end could become stressful. Librarians on public service areas are the easy target of such harassment and are mostly affected by it. However, there could be other sources of stress in the library.

University library managers could reduce stress by supporting their staff through training on wide ranging stress management methods. This would enable librarians to understand the methods they could employ to counter the effect of stress. Librarians themselves could reduce stress in the library by adopting time management to reduce the pressure on them. Knowing what to do at each particular moment could assist librarians to draw their daily schedule to the level of their ability. Working life should also be separated from personal life to avoid conflict of interest and pressure. The period when librarians encounter stress should be identified so that they could adjust their time to cope with the stress when it occurs.

Stress among the librarians in Nigerian University Libraries is not causing any harm on their health and well being. But no matter how minute it exist it is not suppose to be left out. Where it is identified it must be handled properly by adopting the right coping method that would counter its effects. There is no fixed method of cope but librarians could use any method depending on their ability to handle it and result it could produce. Where coping method is not producing the desired result it means it is not appropriate to the situation at hand or the stress is beyond the individual to handle. In this case he may run away from it or may seek for help.

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