

# **Stressors and Job Performance of Health Workers in the Public Sector of Calabar Metropolis, Cross River State, Nigeria**

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## **Abstract**

This study investigated influence of stressors on job performance of health workers in the public sector. Five jobs related stressors investigated, are interpersonal conflict, jobs insecurity, poor remuneration, non-participation in decision making, and inadequate skill acquisition. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data 200 subjects for the study. The data were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient statistics. The result of the study revealed that interpersonal conflict and poor skill acquisition did not significantly influence job performance, while job insecurity, remuneration, and non-participation in decision-making were found to significantly influence job performance of health workers in the public sector. Based on the findings, the following recommendations among others were proffered: Awareness on the deadly impact of stress on health of individuals should be carried out through public lecture campaign; Health care-givers in the public sector should be taught stress coping techniques.

**Keywords:** Stressors, job performance, health workers, public sector, state, Nigeria.

## **1. Introduction**

Calabar is currently undergoing transformation from a civil service city to a much more industrial, tourist and cosmopolitan status. Most of the facilities like housing, roads, water and electricity in particular have become erratic for over a long period of time. Public workers find it very difficult to afford the new prices/cost of decent accommodations due to influx of tourist and investors, and increasing rural urban drift. New investors (private concerns) have taken over available choice estates while public utilities including transportation are either non-existing, insufficient or in a state of disrepair.

The implication of this is that public hospitals are much more patronized by members of the public than the private ones due to its affordability. It is not unlikely that there may be a possible upsurge in the number of people who may want to seek medical attention from them. Thus the need therefore arise to establish whether the prevailing atmosphere in these public hospitals is conducive for health workers to give the patients the tender care and human services they deserve.

Stress has been identified as a major development that undermines workers moral and physical health. According to Castle(2006) and Akah (2005), shortage of man power, inadequate provision of facilities and equipment, unconducive work environment, among others can adversely affect job satisfaction, thereby leading to stress in work place. This greatly reduces productivity and increases disability among the working population. Cooper (1988) in a related study concurred that Stress has become a problem with serious economic and Social Stakes. Studies by Selye (1974) and Luthans (1988) also showed that stress weakens the human immune system, thereby paving way for all sorts of diseases to invade the body of her victim with little or no resistance, depending on the severity of the stress. While analyzing the features of the effects of stressors in man, Selye (1974) coined out an acronym GAS, meaning General Adaptive Syndrome GAS according to him manifests itself in three stages i.e Alarm stage, Resistance stage, and Exhaustion stage.

At the alarm stage, the outside stressors according to Selye (1974) mobilizes the internal stress system of the body, this in turn elicit a number of physiological and chemical reaction such as increase pituitary and adrenalin secretions, noticeable increase in respiration, heart rate and blood pressure, and a heightening of senses. He further explains that if the stressor continues, then the GAS moves into the resistance stage, during which the body calls upon the needed organ or system to deal with the stressor. However, while there may be a great resistance to one stressor, during this second stage, there may be little or no resistance to other unrelated stressors. At this point, persons under such strain may become particularly vulnerable to other illnesses or diseases. This helps explain why the body of a person going through an emotional strain may become a habitat for other forms of diseases. Finally, if the stress persists over a long period of time, the reserves of the adaptive mechanism during the second stage may become drained and exhaustion sets in. Selye (1974) pointed out that this cycle may take its toll on another system or organ, or the automatic shut off valve of death may occur. This GAS process as seen can be very hard on the stress victim, taking its toll on the victim's health or body. This situation brings a shortfall or total decline on job performance. Denga & Ekpo (1994) also affirmed that when stress exceeds normal level, or become too much, job performance begins to decline and when it reaches a breaking point, performance may become zero.

Robbins (1999), Haralambos and Holborn (2004), as well as Stoner and Freeman (1989) observed that poor economic and financial conditions, organizational policies, non participation in decision making conflict, poor working conditions, job insecurity, changes within organizations, poor skill acquisition among others are the conditions that force employees to deviate from their normal functioning. Job stress has thus become an important topic for the study of organizational behaviour, and for effective human resource management. This view was shared by Luthans (1988) and Akah, Chukwurah and Ihejiamaizu (2011) who among others observed that, since stress can have damaging physiological and psychological effects on employees, especially managers; it will affect their health and contribution to effectiveness of organizations. They further pointed out that, Stress is the major source of employee turnover and absenteeism. Luthans (1988) gave a rough estimate of stress related problems being experienced by the US economy, where between \$75 and \$90 billion is lost to staff turnover and absenteeism annually. This according to Luthans represents about 10% of the gross national product. Stress experienced by one employee according to Cole (1998) can affect the safety of other employees or the public in general. For example, if a person who works with dangerous equipment or an air traffic controller becomes stressed up, his declined productivity or lack of it will constitute a great danger to the public. He contended that there is now enough knowledge of stress and work adjustment to indicate that much of stress experienced by today's employees is unnecessary and can be managed. Cole (1988) concluded that by controlling dysfunctional stress, organizations could be better managed more effectively.

Due to the important nature of their job, Akah (2005) observed that health care workers need a work environment and condition where there is minimal distraction, where concentration will improve and patients can get the best available care and treatment. Patients in such environment would be treated with careful attention. Wrong administration of substance due to poor judgment in the face of stress would also be avoided. It is only under a conducive environment that health care givers can demonstrate the life style of tender care, which their job requires and which is the expectation and need of patients. Contrariwise, in a survey carried out, Akah (2005) observed that these expectations of patients as per absolute safety and tender care required of health care givers are often not obtainable. Patients often times, have had their conditions aggravated instead of faring better. Some have met irreparable loss of limb, eyes, untimely death, etc, from what they often referred to as carelessness of health care givers. The researchers thus tried to investigate how selected stressors contribute or relate with job performance of health care givers in Calabar metropolis of Cross River State, Nigeria.

## 2. Methods and Procedures

The design adopted for this study is the ex-post-facto/causal comparative design. The design is one in which cause-and-effect relationship are investigated by first identifying some existing consequences and searching back by analyzing data to establish possible causative factor (Denga & Ali, 1998). In this study, cause of poor job performance among workers was first identified to be stressors. The study aimed at establishing whether public health workers in Calabar equally experience these selected possible stressors and the extent to which their jobs have been affected by these stressors.

Five stressors were identified and hypothesized thus:

- (1) There is no significant relationship between interpersonal conflict and job performance of health workers in the public sector.
- (2) There is no significant relationship between job insecurity and job performance of health workers in the public sector.
- (3) The relationship between remuneration and job performance of health workers in the public sector does not significantly differ.
- (4) The relationship between non-participation in decision making and job performance of health workers in the public sector does not differ significantly.
- (5) There is no significant relationship between skill acquisition and job performance of health workers in the public sector.

The subjects of the study consisted of 200 male and female health workers drawn from public health institutions within the two Local Government Areas (South and Municipality) of Calabar. The subjects were randomly selected among medical Doctors, Pharmacists, Nurses and Laboratory Scientists. Notable among the public Health Institutions used were the University of Calabar Teaching Hospital, National Psychiatric Hospital, Police clinic, Nigerian Navy Hospital and Nigerian Air Force Medical Centre. A validated structured questionnaire was used to collect information from subjects of the study. The validation was done by two experts in research method and statistics in the Department of Education Foundations and two experts in health education and allied fields in the Department of Human Kinetics and Health Education. Both departments are within the University of Calabar. The questionnaire was made up of two sections - A and B. section A consisted of 6 items designed to gather demographic data of the subject. While section B contained 30 items designed to measure the relationship between identified stressors and job performance of health workers in the public sector. The instrument was subjected to a test-retest reliability test. Person Product Moment Correlation technique was used to compare the tests scores. A reliability coefficient  $r$  of 0.85 was obtained, indicating that the instrument is reliable.

The various health establishments were visited by the team of researchers for the administration of the instrument. Data collected were analyzed using Pearson Product Moment Correlation technique. This choice of statistical technique was informed by the fact that the major focus of the study was to determine the relationship between identified stressor and job performance. The testing of the hypothesis was at .05 level of significance.

### 3. Result and Discussion of Findings

Table one below has the result of the Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistical analysis of Stressors and job performance of Public health workers in Calabar Cross River State Nigeria.

**Table 1:** Pearson Product Moment Correlation Statistics of Stressors and job performance of Health Workers in the public Sector (N=200)

Variables	$\sum X$	$\sum Y$	$\sum X^2$	$\sum Y^2$	$\sum XY$	r
Interpersonal conflict (x)	2714	38236				
Job performance (y)	2906	47804				39.524 0.03
Job insecurity (x)	2808	40528				
Job performance (y)	2906	47804				41434 0.27
Remuneration (x)	2400	29344				
Job performance (y)	2906	47804				35866 0.57
Non-participation in Decision (x)	2278	27474				
Job performance (y)	2906	47804				35866 0.16
Poor Skill Acquisition (x)	2922	44322				
Job performance (y)	2906	47804				42654 0.07

\* $p > .05$  df = 198 critical r = .195

The result of the analysis as shown in table one gave the  $r$  of interpersonal conflict and job performance as 0.03. Comparing the calculated  $r$  (0.03) with the critical  $r$  of 0.195, it showed that the critical  $r$  (0.195) is greater than the calculated  $r$  (0.03). Thus the null hypothesis was retained. This therefore implies that interpersonal conflict does not have any significant relationship with job performance of public health workers. This would imply according to the researchers that there is effective management of conflict in public work health organizations. Hodge & Anthony (1991) observed that conflict, which involves strain between two or more people, when not properly managed, could impede any organizations goal. Cole (1998) proffered that since conflict cannot be avoided, means of managing conflict effectively should be the major concern of the management of any work organization.

Furthermore, the researchers reasoned that there is a well structured and organized condition of service and means of seeking redress by employees on areas of workers dissatisfaction in the civil service. More importantly is hierarchical structure providing a clear job definition, which eliminates the place of role conflict. These, they suggested may be the reason why interpersonal conflict does not influence job performance of health workers in the public sector significantly.

On job insecurity and job performance it can be seen from the table that the calculated  $r$  is 0.27. Comparing the calculated  $r$  with the critical  $r$  of 0.195, it shows that the calculated  $r$  (0.27) is greater than the critical  $r$  (0.195). Based on this the null hypothesis was rejected; implying that job insecurity significantly influenced the job performance of public health workers. It can be inferred from the result that job insecurity as a stressor significantly influenced job performance of public health workers in Calabar metropolis. Studies by Cumming (1993), Denga & Ekpo (1994), among other scholars showed that job insecurity might take the form of termination of an employee's appointment or lay off. The finding corroborated the assertion of Cascio that job insecurity is prevalent in most modern work organizations. Cascio (1992) noted that this situation in recent times has led to the formation of employees union which is primarily concerned with opposing such acts that threaten job security. Cascio (1992) further posited that lay-offs are often intended to reduce cost of running an organization. The researchers reasoned that the desire/goal to reduce cost of running public parastatals being one of the major government's pursuits in recent time may be responsible for the job insecurity found to influence job performance of health workers. Secondly, since the health sector is highly specialized deviation from professional ethics have often been met with grave/severe damages. This has in no small way led to withdrawal of licenses of health practitioners or institutions found to be victims of such, thus leading to loss of job.

The result also revealed that remuneration significantly influenced job performance of public health workers. This was ascertained by comparing the calculated  $r$  of 0.57 with the critical  $r$  of 0.195. Since the calculated (0.57) is greater than the critical  $r$  (0.195) the null hypothesis was rejected. From the table, it is also visible that the calculated  $r$  for non-participation in decision making is (0.16), while the critical  $r$  is 0.195. Since the calculated  $r$  (0.16) is greater than the critical  $r$  (0.195), the null hypothesis was rejected. As observed by Cascio (1992), formation of employees union has become a serious social issue that is causing a lot of unrest in our work place and among workforce. Health workers unions in recent times seem to be on the lead in industrial actions for wage increment or improved remuneration in Calabar and Nigeria as a whole. Such strike/industrial actions have led to untold complications on the health condition of patients, and loss of lives. Hodge and Anthony (1991) further posited that when an employee perceives that the possibility of releasing or dispensing benefits that accrue to him or her is low, the fact would lessen the potency of the employers' reward, regardless of the size of the reward. They further noted that this situation to a great extent lowers workers morale, kills initiative, and causes a lot of unrest in the work place. This as observed by the researchers may be the reason why poor remuneration appears to be affecting job performance of public health workers, despite seeming improvement in their pay.

The table also revealed that the calculated  $r$  for non-participation in decision making is 0.16, while the critical  $r$  is 0.195. Since the calculated  $r$  (0.16) is greater than the critical  $r$  (0.195), the null hypothesis was rejected. Thus, non-participation in decision making significantly influenced job performance of public health workers. Clemen (1991) opined that a good decision is one that gives the best outcome. He noted that if the best outcome is desired, it must only come after careful consultation with those who have a role to play in the execution. The researchers observed that even though the medical profession is highly specialized, they are also inter-related. The medical doctor cannot work, pharmacists, or nurses and vice versa. Thus, a level of consultation and understanding will have to be reached before proper actions even on a patient can be executed.

Finally, the result on poor skill acquisition as shown in table one showed that skill acquisition does not significantly influence job performance of health workers in the public sector. This conclusion was reached because the critical  $r$  of .195 was found to be greater than the calculated  $r$  of 0.07, hence the retention of the null hypothesis. This may imply that health workers in the public sector are not poorly skilled. It may also mean that poor skill acquisition is not a stress factor, which seriously affects job performance of health workers in the public sector. Mitchel (1985) posited that workers receive salary or some sort of time based pay. And since the amount they earn is mostly dependent on the amount of time they work, money was not tied to performance. The pay structure of most work organizations in Nigeria, including the public health sector uses the time based pay system. This time based pay method, thus, may be the reason behind the insignificant relationship observed between skill acquisition and job performance of health workers in the public sector. Furthermore, due to the unreliable nature of present day work organizations as observed by Burnes (1993), employees seems to be focused on developing themselves in a particular skill to enhance their chances of survival. This results in the pursuit of their chosen course even at the expense of organizations goals.

#### 4. Conclusion

This study was carried out to investigate the effect of stressors on job performance of health workers in the public sector of Calabar, Cross River State Nigeria. The study summarily established that interpersonal conflict and poor skill acquisition does not have any significant relationship with job performance of public sector health workers; while job insecurity, remuneration, and non-participation in decision making was found to significantly relate with job performance of health workers in the public health sector.

#### 5. Recommendations

Based on the findings of this study, the following recommendations were proffered:

- (1) Public lecture campaigns should be utilized as a means of creating awareness in the public on the deadly impact of stress on individual's health generally and job performance.
- (2) The government should enact laws that can protect workers generally and health workers in particular from the menace of job insecurity, which appears to characterize present day work organizations.
- (3) People attaining managerial positions in public health organizations should be made to undergo training programme on conflict management, especially in work organizations.
- (4) Cooperation among the medical doctors, lab scientists, pharmacists, nurses and other members of the medical team should be strengthened. They should be made to understand that they are to complement one another for good performance.
- (5) Employees/health workers and management staff of public health organizations should be taught stress coping techniques, through seminars and workshops.

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