
EFFECT OF VACATION - BASED STRESS MANAGEMENT INTERVENTION PROGRAM ON JOB PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC AND NON - ACADEMIC STAFF OF OSUN STATE COLLEGE OF EDUCATION, ILA – ORANGUN, NIGERIA

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Abstract

The detrimental effect of stress in the workplace is a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly within the current state of the nation's economy. A country, where many employees, increasingly face conditions of overwork, job insecurity, low levels of job satisfaction, and lack of autonomy. Simply stated, stress is what we feel when we have to respond to demand on our energy. Sufficient recovery is necessary to counteract severe chronic negative load reactions. Previous research has shown that vacationing for at least seven consecutive days provided an efficient recovery strategy. Despite this, the effects of vacation-based stress management and the mode of vacation, whether at home or in a new environment, have rarely been studied. We investigated the immediate and long-term effects of a short vacation (four nights) on well-being and perceived stress and whether the mode of vacation impacted these results. Data were obtained from 26 academics (57.5% men and 43.5% women). The intervention group (n = 20) spent a short vacation in an encamp environment outside their usual working environment. The control group (n = 26) spent their vacation at home. Results indicated that one single short-term vacation, independent of the mode, has large, positive, and immediate effects on perceived stress, recovery, strain, and well-being. Strain levels decreased to a greater extent in the intervention group compared to the control group. The effects can still be detected at 30 days (recovery) and 45 days post-vacation. It is recommended to the college management that the academics and academic support staff should be encouraged to embark on periodic short vacations as it seems to be an efficient health promotion strategy.

Keywords: Vacation - Based Stress Management, Stress Management Intervention, Academic and Non – Academic Staff, Colleges of Education

INTRODUCTION

The detrimental effect of stress in the workplace is a growing concern in Nigeria, particularly within the current state of the nation's economy. A country, where many employees, increasingly face conditions of overwork, job insecurity, low levels of job satisfaction, and lack of autonomy. Simply stated, stress is what we feel when we have to respond to the demand for energy. It is a non-specific response of the body to any demand made upon it. The body attempts to adjust to any situation or agent which tries to destroy its internal balance/equilibrium. This adjustment is to try to bring the internal environment of the body back to normal. This reaction by the body is what is called stress. Anything that causes the body to react is a stressor. Stress, therefore, is caused by a stressor.

A stressor may be any situation; physical, emotional, or psychological, that makes the body mobilize its resources, and increase its energy expenditure. Stress is a natural part of life and occurs whenever there are significant changes in our lives, whether positive or negative. It is generally believed that some stress is okay (sometimes referred to as "positive stress or eustress") but when stress occurs in an amount that individuals cannot cope with, both mental and physical changes may occur.

Workplace stress has been shown to have a negative impact on workplace productivity and profits as well as have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of employees. Workers often face diverse situations in their workplaces. The main source of stress in our lives is related to jobs. Events come up almost daily at work that can result in undue stress which may jolt our psychic durability. Different categories of stress have different effects on individuals. Low-level stress may not be noticeable; mild ones may be tolerable, while high-level ones may be harmful and even lead to chronic diseases (Akinade, 2007, Omolawon and Adisa, 2007). Gupta and Chandwani (2011) observed that over the years, the stress associated with the workplace has become a common and increasing phenomenon that is seriously affecting employees' mental health and well-being. Erkutlu and Chafra (2006) were of the opinion that out of life situations, the workplace stands out as a potential source of stress because of the number of time workers spent in such workplaces. Lu, Cooper, Kao, and Zhou (2003) acknowledged that stress becomes one of the significant inevitable consequences of work-life influencing both individual and organizational performance (Lee, 2002).

The National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH) (2008) asserts that occupational stress has been a long-standing concern of the health care industry. The whole population of workers in Nigeria is being faced with many stressors to cope with. These include work-related, domestic, after-job age or retirement problems, and so on (Kester, Ogidan & Oni, 2012). These stressors are currently reducing their lifespan to the extent that the average life expectancy in Nigeria is dropping daily. AirNinja (2007) reported a drop from 51.56% to 47.44% between the years 2000 to 2007. This is 30% below the 67.2 world average of life expectancy (Ajala, 2011).

Studies in the field of occupational health (Belkic, Landbergis, Schnall, & Baker, 2004; Ferrie, Westerlund, Virtanen, Vahtera, & Kivimaki, 2008) have consistently revealed the adverse effect of stress in the workplace on individuals' health and well-being. This harmful impact is, in part, brought about by physiological stress responses that continue or recur during the nonworking time when job stressors are no longer present (Brosschot, Van Dijk, & Thayer, 2007; Hjortskov et al., 2004).

These prolonged physiological stress responses can be amplified by ruminating thoughts about past and potential future stressors (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006) and may disturb the

person's homeostatic balance (McEwen, 1998), that is, the balance between the sympathetic nervous system being dominant during effort expenditure, (for example, in response to stressors) and the parasympathetic nervous system is in control during rest and relaxation (e.g. recovery).

Accordingly, recovery during nonworking time plays a crucial role in protecting employees against the adverse effects of exposure to job stressors. According to Geurts and Sonnentag (2006), the essence of recovery is that the psychophysiological systems that were activated during work will return to and stabilize at a baseline level, that is, a level that appears in a situation in which no special demands are made on the individual. Although vacation from work, according to Bloom et.al (2010), provides a valuable opportunity for recovery, few studies have met the requirements for assessing its effects. These include taking measurements well ahead of the vacation, during the vacation, and at several points in time afterward. This study, therefore, is intended to bridge this gap.

This study was anchored on Effort-Recovery Theory based on the work of Meijman (1989), Van Veildhoven (1996), and Meijman and Mulder, 1998 and Allostatic Load Theory introduced by McEwen and Stellar in 1993. Effort-Recovery Theory shares the idea that removal of demands previously put on the individual's psychobiological systems is a prerequisite for recovery to occur. Recovery after work may occur regularly between workdays (e.g. during evening hours and during weekends) and during longer periods of off-job time such as vacations, constituting Meta- and Macro-recovery, respectively (Sluiter, Frings-Dresen, Meijman, and Van der Beek, 2000).

Recent diary studies have revealed that workers often recover insufficiently during regular evening hours and weekends, for instance, due to working overtime (Fritz and Sonnentag, 2005; Van Hooff, Geurts, Kompier, and Taris, 2007). This day-to-day incomplete recovery constitutes a high risk for serious health impairment in the long term (Van Hooff et al., 2005).

Vacation as a longer and relatively uninterrupted period of absence from work is a prime candidate for helping workers to recover more completely from work. Vacation may contribute to recovery from work through a rather passive mechanism of liberation from demands, as well as through the active engagement in valued and positively experienced free-time activities of one's own choice (e.g. family activities and hobbies). Allostatic load refers to the cumulative burden of chronic stress and life events. It involves the interaction of different physiological systems at varying degrees of activity. When environmental challenges exceed the individual ability to cope, then allostatic overload ensues. Allostatic load is identified by the use of biomarkers and clinical criteria.

The concept of the allostatic load was introduced by McEwen and Stellar in 1993 and refers to the cost of chronic exposure to fluctuating or heightened neural and neuroendocrine responses resulting from repeated or chronic environmental challenges that an individual reacts to as being particularly stressful. It derives from the definition of allostasis as the ability of the organism to achieve stability through change (Sterling and Eyer, 1988), and the view that healthy functioning requires continual adjustments of the internal physiological milieu (McEwen and Wingfield, 2003).

The definition of allostatic load (McEwen, 2007) reflects the cumulative effect of experiences in daily life that involve ordinary events (subtle and long-standing life situations) as well as major challenges (life events), and also includes the physiological consequences of the resulting health-damaging behaviors, such as poor sleep and circadian disruption, lack of exercise, smoking, alcohol consumption, and unhealthy diet.

Situations that may lead to the development of cumulative burden of chronic stress are exposure to frequent stressors, such as unrelieved workload, that may determine a status of chronic stress and repeated physiological arousal; lack of adaptation to repeated stressors; inability to shut off the stress response after a stressor is terminated; allostatic response not sufficient to deal with the stressor (McEwen, 2008).

Several studies showed that high levels of cumulative burden of chronic stress were correlated with work-related stress (Westerlund, et.al, 2012, Dich et.al, 2015, Mauss, Jarczok, & Fischer, 2016, Rosemberg et.al, 2019, Omolawon and Adisa, 2007), Chronic stress was related to insufficient recovery from work stress, job demand and reorganization at workplace (von Thiele, Lindfors & Lundberg, 2006 and Carlsson et. al, 2017). In a study on civil service workers (Dich et.al, 2014), a non-linear, stable association between negative emotional response to major life events and the allostatic load was observed. Positive working environment build positive emotions and one of the ways to create this is through encouragement of vacation – based stress management interventions for the employees.

According to Frederickson's Broaden-and-Build Theory (2001), positive emotions *broaden* an individual's momentary thought-action repertoire: joy sparks the urge to play, interest sparks the urge to explore, contentment sparks the urge to savour and integrate, and love sparks a recurring cycle of each of these urges within safe, close relationships. The broaden-and-build theory describes the form and function of a subset of positive emotions, including joy, interest, contentment, and love. Positive emotion builds enduring resources (e.g. intellectual, physical, social, and psychological). Positive emotions (e.g. joy, contentment, and love) experienced during vacation may not only strengthen the social bond with partners, family members, and/or friends, they may also break habitual thought patterns and lead to unusual, creative, fresh ideas to solve long-lasting (job-related) problems.

Therefore, a vacation-based stress management intervention may help to build up enduring personal resources that may function as a buffer for future threats to workers health.

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

There are measures that individuals and organizations can take to alleviate the negative impact of stress or to stop it from arising in the first place. However, employees' first need to recognize the sign that indicates that they are feeling stressed out and employers need to be aware of the effects that stress has on the employees' health as well as the organization's profits. This research is carried out to assist the management of Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun in taking actions on managing staff stress levels in the College workplace.

Often, many academic and academic affairs supportive staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun are often seen exhibiting characteristics of being stressed such as mood swings, depression, assumed to be too rigid by students, restless, unapproachable, and also too busy. Some have been observed having stress-related diseases emanating from their inability to manage stress healthily. Omolawon and Adisa (2007) reported that some do take to abuse as means of escaping boredom, which ultimately affects their social and mental health. This erroneously is associated with the poor performance of the students in their semester examinations. It is believed that the attitude may have emanated as a result of stressful situations being experienced by these categories of staff. Records particularly from the college of education, Ila - Orangun showed that sometimes ago about three academic staff collapsed while on active duty as a result of assumed high levels of stress in the workplace.

Against this backdrop, it is therefore pertinent to find out the true situation of stress level in the College and proffer possible solution to prevent such occurrence in the future. Hence, the reasons why the researchers embarked on this intervention study.

Thus, the research is proposed to address the following research questions:

- (a) What are the main causes of stress for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun?
- (b) What is the manifestation of stress effects on the academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun?
- (c) Are the academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun having knowledge about the effect of stress?

Research Hypotheses

The following research hypotheses are proposed for the study:

Ho. 1: Vacation-based Stress Intervention Programme will not be a significant stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun.

Ho. 2: There will be no significant difference in pre and post-test results of vacation-based stress management strategies for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun.

METHODOLOGY

The pre-test – post-test randomized group experimental design was adopted for this study. The population for this study comprises all academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun.

Purposive sampling technique was used to select the 42 academics (Provost, Deputy Provost, Librarian, Director of Academic Planning, Directors of Academic Programs, Deans of Schools, Heads of departments and Examination officers) and Academic affairs support staff (Registrar, Deputy Registrar academic affairs, and School officers, Secretaries of academic programme directorates and Academic Planning & Management Information System Officers). A Simple random sampling technique was used to randomly assign the purposively selected staff into the experimental and control groups of 26 equal members.

Three sets of standardized instruments were used for this study. The first two are; State anxiety Evaluation Scale and Trait Anxiety Evaluation Scale developed by Richard Willis (2005). These two Stress Inventories were used to find out the Stress Zones the participants belong to before, during, and after the treatment. The third instrument was the Stress Inventory developed by Dr. Julian Melgosa (2007), this instrument comprises 96 items grouped into 6 scales (Lifestyle, Environment, Symptoms, Employment/occupation, Relationships, and Personality). The internal consistency of the standardized instruments adopted for the study had received prior approval from senior colleagues and experts particularly in the field of psychiatric, psychology, guidance and counseling, and health education. However, the researchers further went ahead to subject the instruments to test-retest reliability procedure and analyzed with Pearson Product Moment Coefficient (PPMC). The State Anxiety Evaluation Scale yielded an estimate of 0.83; the Trait Anxiety Evaluation Scale yielded an estimate of 0.85, while the Stress Inventory yielded an estimate of 0.89

reliability coefficients. The data collected were coded and analyzed at a 0.05 level of significance.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Hypothesis 1: Vacation-based Stress Intervention Programme will not be a significant stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun.

Table 1a: Summary of the result showing the pre-post effects of vacation-based stress management strategy on the academic and academic affairs support staff of in Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun

Source	Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Partial Eta Squared
Corrected Model	116.142	2	58.071	3.437	.043	.164
Intercept	15.003	1	15.003	.888	.353	.025
Pretest	7.341	1	7.341	.434	.514	.012
Treatment (vacation-based)	100.742	1	100.742	5.962	.020	.146
Error	591.437	35	16.898			
Total	3204.000	38				
Corrected Total	707.579	37				

As shown in table 1a, there was a significant difference in pre and post-test results of vacation-based stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun ($F_{(1,35)} = 5.962$, $p < 0.05$, $\eta^2 = .146$); hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. This implies that the vacation-based stress Intervention programme was a significant stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun. It means that vacation-based stress management strategy was essentially effective on the management of stress; particularly among academic and academic affairs support staff in the College of Education. The eta square value of 0.146 showed that the treatment (vacation-based stress management strategy) had a contribution of 14.6% to the participants' responses to stress management.

Table 1b: Estimated marginal means of participants' responses to stress management

Treatment Groups	Mean	Std. Error	95% confidence interval	
			Lower Bound	Upper Bound
Vacation-based (Experimental)	9.834	.973	7.859	11.808
Workplace-stress (Control)	6.550	.922	4.677	8.422

Table 1b showed that participants in the treatment group had a higher posttest mean score of 9.83 on response to stress management than the participants in the control group with a post-test mean score of 6.55. This means that participants that were exposed to vacation-based stress management intervention performed better than those in the control group. It implied that vacation-based stress management intervention is an effective stress management intervention that could improve well-being of academic staff.

Hypothesis 3: There will be no significant difference in pre and post-test results of vacation-based stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila-Orangun.

Table 2: Paired t-test result showing the pre-post effects of vacation-based stress management strategy on academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila–Orangun

Variable (vacation-based stress management strategy)	Mean	Std. Dev.	N	Df	t-value	Sig. (p value)	Remark
Pre vacation-based stress mgt.	11.4211	5.04376	38	37	7.523	.000	Sig.
Post-vacation-based stress mgt.	33.8421	18.48816					

Table 2 revealed that there was a significant difference in the pre and post-test result of vacation-based stress management strategy on academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila–Orangun ($t=7.523$, $df=37$, $p<0.05$). Hence, the null hypothesis was rejected. The table further revealed that the post-test mean score of vacation-based stress management ($\bar{x}=33.8421$) was higher than the pre-test mean score ($\bar{x}=11.4211$); with a mean difference of 22.421. This means that exposure of the participants to vacation-based stress management strategy training contributed significantly to the better performance (higher mean score) recorded by them during post-test over that of the pre-test result. However, it was noticed that most workers used for the study soon went back to pre-vacation status 6 weeks after the intervention. This result was found to be in line with the findings of Westman and Etzion (2001) in their study titled The Impact of Vacation and Job Stress on Burnout and Absenteeism. Their study revealed that vacation had a distinct and ameliorating effect on the perception of job stress and on the experience of burnout and that immediately after vacation, followed a return to the pre-vacation level after four weeks. Several other studies such as Eden, 1990; Frankenhaeuser et al., 1989; Westman and Eden, 1997; and Etzion et al., 1998; revealed that vacation alleviated perceived job stress and thus also the experience of burnout. This study, therefore, shows that a planned or approved intermittent break from work has the effect of reducing strain to levels that are not considered chronic.

Conclusion

Based on the findings of this study, it was concluded that there was a significant difference in pre and post-test results of vacation-based stress management strategy for academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila–Orangun. It was also concluded that there was a significant difference in the pre and post-test result of vacation-based stress management strategy on academic and academic affairs support staff in Osun State College of Education, Ila–Orangun.

Recommendation

Based on the Findings of this result the following recommendations were therefore made:

1. The management of Osun State College of Education, Ila – Orangun should encourage and ensure that their staff embark on a vacation to ease off work stress whenever the symptoms of stress are noticed among them.
2. The College management should allow the academic staff and academic affairs staff to embark on leave that they are entitled to as and when due to reduce effects or work stress.

3. The College management should periodically organise structured Vacation – Based Stress management programmes for academic and academic affairs support staff of the college.
4. The College management should include in her policy the procedure for evaluating the work stress levels of staff, periodically or sporadically, in order to discover those in need of intervention on time.

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