

THE INFLUENCE OF PERCEIVED ORGANIZATIONAL SUPPORT ON JOB STRESS AMONG SELECTED PUBLIC AND PRIVATE SECTOR EMPLOYEES IN LAGOS STATE, NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This study explored the influence of perceived organizational support on job stress among selected public and private sector employees in Nigeria. Simple random sampling technique was used to select three hundred and fifty four (354) participants (M = 181: F = 173) from both public (n=177) and private organizations (n=177). Two psychological Tests, namely: Perceived Organizational Support Scale (POSS) and the Job Stress Scale (JSS) were completed by the participants and the data collected were analyzed using Pearson's product moment correlation, independent sample t-tests, and simple linear regression at 0.05 level of significance for the purpose of testing the three hypotheses proposed in this study. The results revealed a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress, this implies that an increase in perceived organizational support will lead to a decrease in the level of job stress and vice versa; it was also found that perceived organizational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress and finally, there was no significant difference in the responses to job stress between the participants who had high scores and low scores in perceived organizational support scales. Based on these findings, management should endeavour to provide supportive working environment in order to minimize employees' job stress. However, it is recommended that further researches should be done to ascertain other variables responsible for variances in job stress in workplaces.

Keywords: Organizational Support, Job Stress, Employees

Introduction

Employees are the most important asset of any organization, they are the engine through which the organization runs her day to day activities and as a result organizations should focus on those factors that can directly and indirectly affect their employees' performance at work. According to Erkutlu and Chafra (1), stress is one of the factors that can impede employees' performance at work. Stress is a term that is widely used in everyday life and it is globally acknowledged as a major challenge to workers' health, and the health of an organization. Colquitt, Lepine, and Wesson (2) define stress as a psychological response to demands that possess certain stakes or exceed a person's capacity or resources. According to Arogundade and Onabanjo (3), stress is the state of a person in response to changes occurring in the environment that places too little or too much demand on the individual with normal adjustment responses being either unavailable or not efficacious to re-establish equilibrium.

Stress therefore is an inevitable part of life and it is a combination of physical and psychological reactions to events that threaten or challenge human beings. Among life situations, the workplace stands out as a potentially important source of stress purely because of the amount of time that is spent in this setting (4).

Consequently, it has become popular to attribute some abnormal behaviour of employees to the fact that they are under stress. The various demands that cause people to experience stress are referred to as stressors, while strains are the negative consequences of the stress response. The Nigerian society for example, is cumbered with a lot of daily stressors ranging from

traffic jam, poor road safety regulation and maintenance, fuel scarcity, insecurity to poor working environment.

Although every individual is susceptible to a certain degree of stress, the perception and reaction to stressors differ from one person to another, this is because stressors can either be good (positive) or bad (negative) depending on the type of stressors. In other words, stress can either stimulate creativity and productivity, energize employees to meet challenging goals or overwhelm employees as well as hinder business performance. Eustress is a type of positive stress that propels an employee to perceive challenges, difficulties, work complexity and responsibilities as opportunities for learning, improvement, growth and achievement. This type of stress often generate positive emotions such as pride and enthusiasm (2). Whereas on the other hand distress is another type of negative stress that is exhausting in nature and has the attributes of failure, discouragement and burnout (3).

According to Maxon (5), no individual reaches peak performance without being stressed, whether an athlete, an office worker or a manager. The natural pattern of human behaviour is to experience a stress-causing event or situation, react to it with increased tension and then return to a normal, relaxed state, however, the problem occurs when stress becomes so overwhelming or constant to the extent of breaking normal human functioning.

Lazarus and Folkman (6) hold that job stress is a function of the relationship between the employees and their work environment. The environmental factors involved in the stress inducing processes are called job stressors while the individual's reactions to these stressors are referred to as strains. According to Lazarus and Folkman (6), there are three types of strains namely: physiological strains such as high blood pressure and other cardiovascular diseases, as well as musculoskeletal system problems; second, psychological strains such as burnout, anxiety, anger, memory loss and loss of sense of humour; and third, behavioural strains such as overuse of alcohol, excessive smoking, drug abuse and other unhealthy behaviours. Thus, organizations and employees requires skills and abilities to manage stress in order to maximize productivity, reduce job accident as well as maintain physical and mental health of the employees because too much of job stress can be dysfunctional to organizational and individual outcomes (4). Moreover, since job stress is an inevitable part of work, organizations should seek to benefit positively from job stress by promoting other features of work, such as social support that enables employees to cope with excessive demands at work. The benefits of providing support are most often considered in relation to preventing or alleviating stress and burnout (3;7). The sources of these social supports may be friends, agencies, families, co-workers and supervisors (8).

Social support refers to the effort and endeavours that provide emotional and psychological ability and help for another. The support may be emotional or instrumental depending on whether it can satisfy employees' needs or not (8-10). According to Cropanzano, Howes, Grandey, and Toth (11), provision of support thus helps to address stress in three ways namely: enhancing coping capacity, reducing severity of stress and buffering the impact of work demands on stress.

This study is guided by the theoretical frame work *organizational support theory*. Organizational support theory states that employees develop global beliefs regarding the extent to which the organization values their contributions and is concerned about their well-being (12). According to organizational support theorists, perceived organizational support results from employees' tendency to assign humanlike characteristics to an organization, so the organization becomes personified (13).

In stressful situations, perceived organizational support might reduce psychological strain by indicating the availability of emotional and tangible support (14). According to Chen (15), a large body of evidence indicates that employees with high levels of perceived organizational support judge their jobs more favourably (e.g., increased job satisfaction, more positive

mood, and reduced stress) and are more invested in their organization (e.g., increased affective organizational commitment, increased performance and reduced turnover. Organizational support guarantees employees that the organization is behind them as they handle stressful situations and execute their jobs (16). The social support can be from either the supervisor or the organization. Rhoades et al. (12) hold that agents of the organization are usually viewed as indicators of the organization's intent. Employees receiving favourable treatment from a supervisor will most likely perceive their organization as supportive. Moreover, employees perceive organizational support when they feel that their organization provides enough training and resources for their well-being (13). Thus, perceived organizational support can be viewed as a positive attribute that gives employees assurance that help will be available from the organization when such is necessary to complete one's job in stressful situations. In view of the foregoing, the study is set to find out the pattern of relationship that exists between perceived organizational support and job stress as well as ascertain if perceived organizational support account for differences in manifestation of job stress. Thus, the following hypotheses will be tested:

1. There will be a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress.
2. Perceived organizational support will significantly predict variance in job stress.
3. Participants classified as scoring high on perceived organizational support will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as scoring low on perceived organizational support.

Methodology

Research design

The descriptive survey research design was used in this study and Psychological Tests were administered to consenting participants for the purpose of data collection.

Population and Sample

The population of the study comprised of Two thousand five hundred and twenty five (2,525) workers, out of which one thousand nine hundred and seventy three (1,973) were from Lagos Internal Revenue Service employees in Ikeja, Lagos (representing public sector organization) and five hundred and forty two (542) were staff of the Redeemer's University, Nigeria (representing private sector organization). However, four hundred copies of the psychological test were randomly administered and a sample of three hundred and fifty four (354) employees successfully completed the tests and the socio-demographic details of the participants are shown in Table 1.

Instruments

The instruments used for data collection in this study were the Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) and the Job Stress Scale.

1. The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support (SPOS) was developed by Eisenberger et al. (13), to measure employees' beliefs concerning the extent to which the organization values the employee's contribution and cares about his or her well-being. The Survey of Perceived Organizational Support containing seventeen items with the following sample questions: The organization value my contributions to its wellbeing; the organization fails to appreciate any extra efforts from me ; the organization cares about my opinion. The reliability of the *Survey of Perceived Organizational Support* was reported to have a *Cronbach alpha* coefficient values ranging from .74 to .95.

2. The Job Stress Scale developed by Parker and Decotiis (17), contains thirteen items for measuring job stress along two dimensions namely: time stress and anxiety stress

dimensions. The test items include: working here makes it hard to spend time enough with my family; I feel like I never have a day off; my job get to me more than it should. The reliability of the *Job Stress Scale* was reported to have a *Cronbach alpha* coefficient of .86.

Data Analyses

The data collected were coded accordingly into the Statistical Package for the Social Sciences (SPSS) version 20 on a personal computer and were analyzed using Pearson Correlation Marx, Linear Regression Analysis, and independent Sample t-test.

Table 1

Socio-Demographic Characteristics of Participants

Variables		Frequency	Percentage (%)
Age Range	21-30	141	39.8
	31-40	166	46.9
	41-50	40	11.3
	51 and above	7	2.0
Marital Status	Single	152	42.9
	Married	201	56.8
	Divorced	1	0.3
Gender	Male	181	51.1
	Female	173	48.9
Organizational types	Public	177	50
	Private	177	50

Table1 above shows the vivid socio-demographic attributes of the participants who took part in the study.

Hypotheses Testing

Hypothesis 1: There will be a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress.

Table 2

Correlation Between Perceived Organizational Support and Job Stress.

Variables	N	r-value	P
Perceived Organizational Support	354	-0.24	<.01
Job Stress			

Table 2 Correlation matrix shows that there is a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress $r = -0.24$, $N = 354$, $P < .01$. Thus, hypothesis one is accepted.

Hypothesis 2: Perceived organizational support will significantly predict job stress.

Table 3

Linear Regression of Perceived Organizational Support on Job Stress.

Variable	R	r ²	P
Perceived Organizational Support	.24	.06	<.01

Dependent variable: Job stress

Table 3 Linear Regression shows that perceive organizational support significantly predict job stress (r^2 : .06; $P < .01$). This means that perceived organizational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress. Hence, the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 3: Participants classified as scoring high on perceived organizational support will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as scoring low on perceived organizational support.

Table 4

Independent-Sample t-Test of Employees Job Stress Level Based on Perceived Organizational Support.

POS Level	N	Mean	S.D	t	P
<i>High Perceived Organizational Support.</i>	182	36.30	10.41	-2.29	>.01
<i>Low Perceived Organizational Support</i>	172	38.80	10.14		

Table 4 Independent-Sample t-Test shows there was no significant difference in the scores for high *Perceived Organizational Support* ($M = 36.30$, $SD = 10.41$) and Low *Perceived Organizational Support* ($M = 38.80$, $SD = 10.14$) levels; $t = -2.29$, $P > .01$. Since $P > 0.01$, the alternate hypothesis is not supported.

Discussion of findings

The objective of this study was to investigate the influence of perceived organizational support on job stress among selected public and private sector employees of Nigeria. Hypothesis one which states that there will be a significant inverse relationship between perceived organizational support and job stress was supported. This implies that an increase in perceived organizational support will lead to a decrease in job stress. This finding was supported by Khurshid and Anjum (18), who reported a negative correlation between perceived organizational support and occupational stress among secondary school teachers. According to Khurshid et al. (18), stress is a negative variable while perceived organizational support is a positive variable. This means that the level of employees' stress is likely to be on the high side when they feel that no support is given by their organizations, management, co-workers or other staff members. Furthermore, Cropanzano et al. (11) corroborated this finding in their research work titled 'The Relationship of Organizational Politics and Support to Work Behaviours, Attitudes, and Stress'. They noted that if an employee perceives a

supportive environment, stress levels are less intense. Moreover, when the supportive environment is more stable and predictable, it is easier for an employee to invest considerable effort with the confidence of a reasonable return. In general, when people feel that they have social support from others, they report less stress, less anxiety, greater life satisfaction, and more psychophysical health (11).

For instance, a supportive organization creates a more predictable environment and also provides employees with helpful co-workers to whom they can turn for assistance. These kinds of effects should reduce stress levels. Thus, organizations can reduce job stress by increasing factors that increase employees' perceived organizational support.

Hypothesis 2 stating that perceived organizational support will predict job stress was accepted. It was observed that perceived organizational support does significantly predict job stress. This means that perceived organizational support accounted for 6% variance in job stress. This finding was consistent with Eisenberger et al. (14), who noted that perceived organizational support has potentials of reducing psychological strain in stressful situations. Moreover, Chen (15) found that high levels of perceived organizational support enhances employees' favourable disposition to their jobs which can be linked with increased job satisfaction, more positive mood, and reduced stress. However, other variables responsible for the 94% variance in job stress as noted in this study can be examined by future researches in the area of job stress.

Finally, hypothesis 3 stating that participants classified as scoring high on perceived organizational support scale will manifest low job stress compared to participants classified as low on perceived organizational support was not supported. The findings revealed that there was no significant difference between those who perceived high organizational support and their counterparts who had low level of perceived organizational support on response to job stress. Although there was no significant difference between the two groups, It was noted that participants with low perceived organizational support were more susceptible to job stress than their counterparts with high organizational support. This finding is consistent with studies of Randall et al. (19), who reported that low perceived organizational support is closely linked with high turnover and job stress.

The findings of this study have some practical and empirical implications. This study revealed the contributory role of organizational support in relationship to susceptibility of employees to job stress. However, the impact of perceived organizational support in stress management seems to be minimal. Thus, future researches in the area of job stress should examine other possible variables that may contribute significantly to job stress.

Recommendations

In view of some of the findings of this study, the researchers recommend that human resource managers should adopt strategies that can enhance employees' perceived organizational support, such as periodic training and development programmes, secured work environment, rewards that are adequate and general practices that is considered to be free and fair. Furthermore, it is recommended that future researchers should consider implementing larger and more robust multivariate experimental designs to better determine the cause-effect variables and moderating variables responsible for job stress.

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AUTHORS' CONTRIBUTIONS

'Author AOT' designed the study, performed the statistical analysis and wrote the protocol. 'Author OA' wrote the first draft of the manuscript and managed the analyses of the study. 'Author AAB' managed the literature searches. All authors read and approved the final manuscript."