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Work-related Stress among Librarians and Information Professionals in a Nigerian University

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Introduction

The whole population of workers in Nigeria are being faced with many stress factors to cope with or managed. These factors include work-related, domestic, after-job age or retirement problem, etc. These factors are currently reducing their lifespan to the extent that the average life expectancy in this country is dropping everyday. 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. Librarians and information managers are not left out in this situation.

In fact there are emerging issues in the profession that pose a threat or stress factor to librarians, especially the academic librarians. These include new expectations, and the constantly changing role of librarians due to the dynamic nature of information and its delivery in the University system, triggered by the emergence of information technology IT in the library and information practice. The funding problems that have continued to plague Nigerian libraries, lack of enough human and other resources and role conflict or ambiguity are increasing the librarian's stress.

Skill Soft (2006) described IT related job as the first on the world top-ten most stressful jobs while Swanson (1992) explained that librarians serving the youth, face many of the same demands as do educators, a group already identified as high-risk. Ferkol (1998) also declared that the level of stress in libraries and information centers will continue to rise in the future, if not properly understood and managed. Thus a study on stress assessment and its management among librarians and information managers in the University system can be justified.

Lehnert (2002) described stress as a complex, dynamic process of interaction between a person and his or her life. He explained further that it is the way we react physically, mentally and emotionally to the various conditions, changes and demands of life. It is a concept regarded as a specific irritating events, life cycle transitions and conflicts with either your belief system or your surroundings throughout a time period.

Covey (1989) explained that in some school of thought stress is regarded to be a relative term in the sense that what is irritating and stressful to one person may make no difference to another. In his suggestions he came out with a concept that "in an independent situation every P problem is a PC opportunity".

Since issues of changes and demands of life, life cycle transition, beliefs, culture and environment are

all associated with stress, problem of stress and its management can therefore be conveniently viewed in an anthropological discuss. Thus in this work an anthropological approach of study will be adopted in looking at the problem of stress among librarians in the University of Ibadan Library System Nigeria.

University of Ibadan Library System

The University of Ibadan Library System was established with the establishment of the Ibadan University College in 1946. This is the first University library in Nigeria and one of the first University libraries in the African South of Sahara (Oyemakinde and Ajala, 2001). The library is also the largest University library in the country. Presently her various types of collections is over a million, housed in two big libraries, Kenneth Dike Library at the main campus and Latunde Odeku Medical Library at the University College Hospital Campus. Because of the decentralized library system, some of these collections are also housed in the twelve other faculty libraries scattered around the two campuses of the University.

There are over 100 staff working in the library out of which about 17 are academic staff while the others are non-academic staff.

Currently the library serve over 50,000 students of the University, about 4,500 staff of the University and many other students and staff of the about 92 other universities in the country trouping in on many occasion to use the rich manual and electronic resources of the library.

This condition has over-stretched the usage of the facilities and also poses high stress implications on the staff. This can be noticed from the library statistics on the number of users patronizing the library per day, the level of usage of the materials consulted and the number of slips for outside users counted per day. When all these are compared with the limited material resources in the library and the number of available staff on ground, an air of stress is definitely noticed.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is therefore to identify the perceived area and causes of stress among the librarians of the University of Ibadan Library System, find out how these librarians are managing their stress and then identify the support system available.

Limitations to the Study

- The study is limited to the library staff of Kenneth Dike Library and some staff of the faculty libraries on the main campus.
- The study does not extend to the staff on the University College Hospital campus due to some constraints.

Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Wikipedia (2007) categorize stress using different criteria, but generally stress was grouped as physical or psychological. This was further explained that the physical stress is the one that irritate or brings immediate or long term negative effect on your physical or bodily health. This may not necessarily affect your psychological (or Mental) state. Whereas the psychological stress brings immediate or long term irritation or negative effect on your psychological or mental state. This may not necessarily have any immediate effect on your physical state. But these two groups can be very interactive i.e. your physical state can affect your psychological state and vice versa.

Lehnert (2002) also categorize stress as acute (immediate) which can be one-time incident that usually comes and goes quickly. Its effect he described can last from minutes or hours to days or weeks. Whereas the chronic (long-term) which can be caused by a continuing string of stressful incidence of an ongoing situation.

Ferkol (1998) reported the study of Schneider in 1991 on stress and job satisfaction by comparing people working in public services with those working in technical services in large public library system. The study was conducted because of the growing concerns of the employees working at the library; there were no enough employees to handle the work load and it appeared that this was having a harmful effect on the workers health (Schneider 1991). The findings from the study revealed that apart from the too much load of work

affecting the health of workers, there were more factors bringing greater stress on the workers like poor funding which definitely leads to poor availability of resources, management's poor communication with workers, failure to allow workers to participate in decision making and poor work environment.

Burge (1987) provides the result from his stress management workshops using group interview to collect data from people participating in the workshop from different kinds of libraries, as well as people holding different positions in the libraries. His findings revealed that different groups of librarians often had similar feelings regarding job satisfaction and stress. He went further to reveal that cataloguers for example expressed that they did not get recognition for their efforts, but instead received complaints regarding subject headings that were not useful and that processing was not done quickly enough.

Routray and Satpathy (2007) described the types of stress in digital library environment and broadly divided them into: Technological, Physical, Mental and Situational. Technological stress was described as the stress due to the development and application of information technologies among the library and information professionals. Due to rapid change in computer hardware and software, obsolescence of existing hardware and software is a common phenomenon in almost all libraries. Thus there is the necessity to keep pace with the changing technologies which due to financial, time or technological constraints, it is difficult to do.

Physical stress was described as the negative effect of physical exertion on the physical health of library workers on the job. For example the digital library environment has changed the physical structure of the job environment. Due to sitting in front of computer for a long hour, working in an air-conditioned environment etc., have resulted in the physical stress and illness. This is a times triggered by overwork, lack of rest and poor diet. Mental stress is traced to a persons' mental state of mind, which involves expectation, fears, regrets etc.

Situational stress is explained as derived from the interaction with the outer world like. For example stress due to role as a library manager, stress due to a new position or changing role. It may also be stress due to interaction with co-workers, managers or patrons. This is supported by the study of Haack, Jones and Roose (1984) and thus suggested training in communication and stress management as solutions to this problem.

Nawe (1995) also explained that role conflict can cause stress because library and information professionals have various supervisors who do not agree on what the employee should be doing. Whereas stress is also caused by role ambiguity which is present when an employee does not know that for which he or she is responsible. She explained also that when employees do not use their skills, it can be as stressful as being overworked whereas librarians may experience stress in assisting patrons because they do not have time to become an expert on each and every system.

Kinman (1998) reported from his study that there were no significant differences found between men and women of United kingdom UK academic and related staff in patterns of stress levels, nor were there gender differences in terms of expectations of future job-related stress. But he expressed that levels of reported work-related stress were associated with age. He revealed that stress levels increased with age, to peak in the decades 41-50 and 51-60 while perception of stress decreased significantly, however in the decade 61-70.

The economic impact of work-place stress was properly discoursed by Kinman (1998). He expressed the fact that in UK the impact of work-place stress is not inherently bad nor necessarily too destructive but it is obvious that this can not be compared with the African situation in which the condition and work environment is incomparably worse to that of UK. His observation and view that work-place stress can have a wide ranging and negative impact on the well-being of the individual and his or her day-to-day functioning is true of work-place in many African countries. This he said is observable at physical level (e.g. exhaustion, headaches, high blood pressure), at psychological level (e.g. depression, anxiety, low self –esteem), at cognitive level (e.g. absent mindedness, failure of attention and memory), and at behavioral level (e.g. absenteeism, substance abuse, aggressive behavior, usage of abusive language, low work output etc.). This directly or indirectly always leads to organizational lower output or turn-out and ineffectiveness.

Kinman (1998) then concluded by observing that it has been suggested that occupational stress is now considered to be amongst the top five work-related health problems in the United State of America. This may not be far from being the same in Nigeria, and library and information profession is now becoming a high risk one. Thus a quick understanding of the stress factors and timely work related clinical trial is desired.

Theoretical Framework

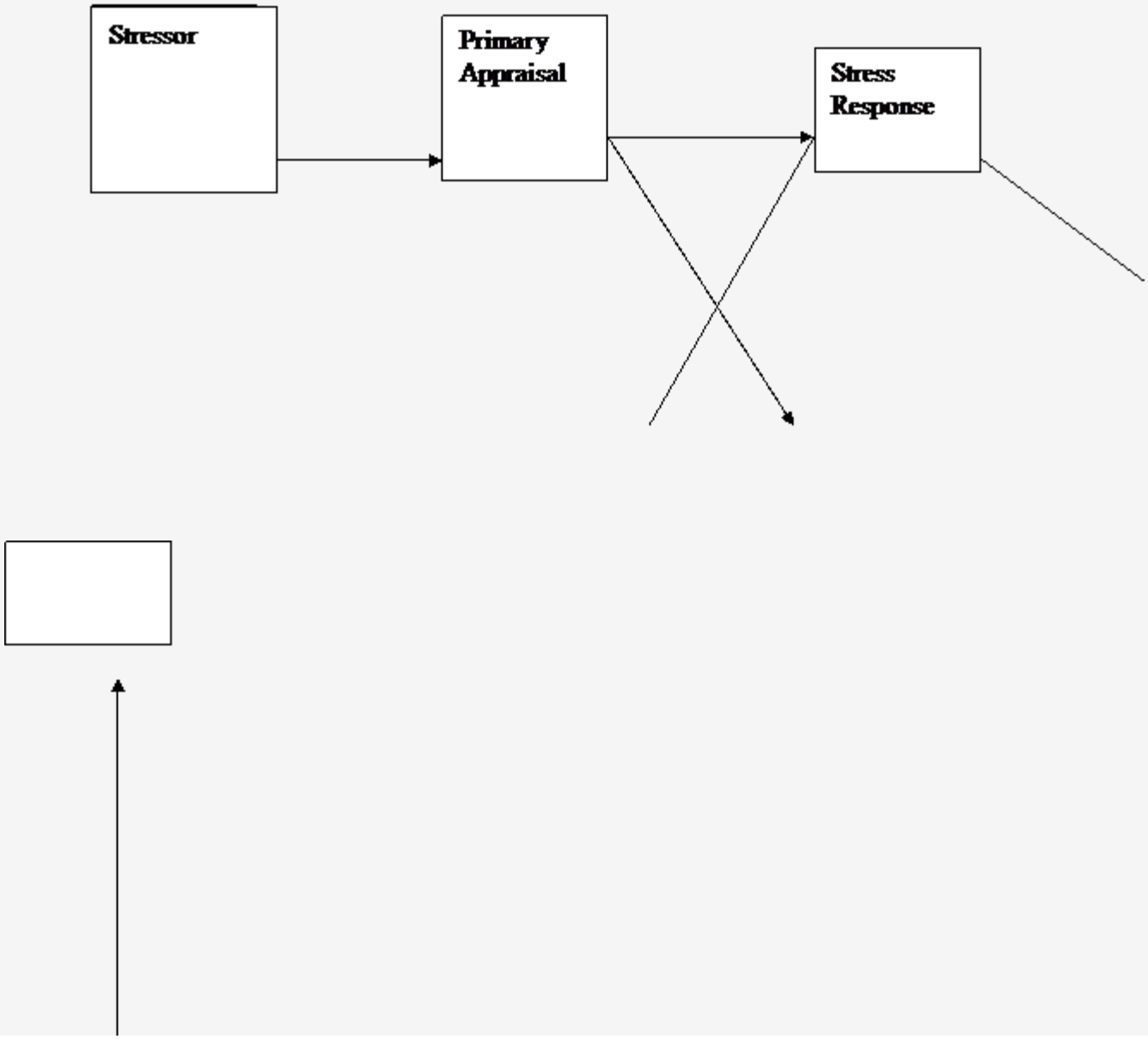
Ross and Altimaier (1994) described three various models and theories that were developed by scholars to understand, prevent and remediate occupational stress. These are:

- General Adaptation Syndrome (GAS) model- developed by Hans Selye in 1956 which describe stress as the response of the individuals;
- Stressors in the Environment model- developed by Adolf Meyer in the 1930s but further developed by Holmes and Rache in 1967 which describe stress as the accumulation of difficulties in an individual's environment; and
- Transactional Model (or interactional model) - developed by Richard Lazarus around 1978 which describe stress as the interaction of characteristics of the person and factors in the environment. Transactional model is described by Ross and Altimaier (1994) as the most widely regarded today. Thus this is the model that will be adopted and applied in this study.

This model describes stress as occurring when there is an imbalance between demands and resources and emphasizes the ongoing nature of the balance or imbalance. In addition, the model describe further that environments can influence people and that people can influence environment, thus, any particular person-environment encounter has implications for both the person and the environment.

Lazarus explained that a person should evaluate a particular event, situation, or demand. This evaluation he termed Primary appraisal which may be appraisal of harm, threat or challenge; Secondary appraisal which is the individual's attempt to define what coping options are available for dealing with the harm, threat or challenge. These options might be internal or external and might be resources or responses

Stressor Appraisal Reaction



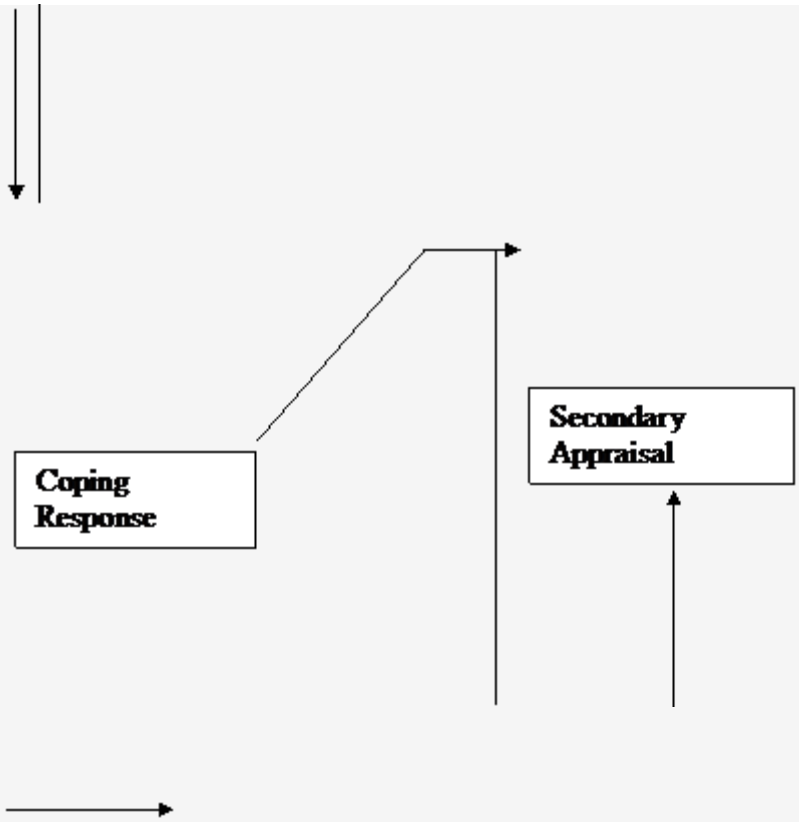


Fig 1 International Model of Stress and Coping Response

(From Ross and Altmaier, 1994)

This model is an interactional or transactional one in that the available coping resources have a strong influence on the future appraisal of the event or situation as stressful. The model allows us to understand stress as the combination of personal issues and responses that a person can fell upon in times of stress, which also change over time. These responses, in turn affect the initial situation or stressor, and may cause us to appraise it, or think about it, differently. Where the balance of demands and resources defines stress if the demands are greater than the resources, then the stress occurs. The reverse is also indicated, if the resources are available to meet the demand, then the secondary appraisal might be one of challenges rather than harm or threat and thus would be less stressful to the individual. This can be applied to the library and information work place stress especially at the University of Ibadan libraries.

Methodology

Bunge (1987) employ the use of group interview in his study on stress management. This was found to be appropriate because of the interactive and transactional nature of the individual and the factor of stress. While Monica Ollendorff in 1989 studied stress management among librarians and used survey method with the employment of questionnaire as data collection instrument.

In this study, because of the anthropological approach of study adopted, qualitative method of data collection was used while group and personal interview was employed as data collection instrument. Some of the questions posed to the group and individuals interviewed was base on the following headings:

1. Demographic information of respondents
2. Working Environment
3. Personal or Internal factors
4. Home-work Interface
5. Professional/Academic demand
6. Management Problem
7. Job Security
8. Job satisfaction

9. Coping Strategy

Two groups randomly constituted from the main and faculty libraries in the main campus and Eighty (80) library staff were randomly interviewed. The Eighty library staff comprised of about 20 academic staff and 60 non-academic staff of the library, located in the main and faculty libraries in the main campus. Gender and status of the sample interviewed was also carefully considered in the choice of the sample so as to have the feelings from every gender and cadres of staff. Because the study was conducted in the same campus it is easier to carry out the interview among the groups and individuals but in order to extract the mind of the sample used and for the richness of the data collected, each interview was given a good time. The analysis of the data collected was purely descriptive.

Findings

From the group and individual interviews conducted, the following issues can be noticed as summary of all the responses gathered on the following headings as it affects issues on stress among librarians in the Ibadan University libraries.

Demographic Data

It can be noticed that there were no significant difference between the male and the female about their perception on the issue of work-place stress, or reported stress level, though more male respondents seems to gain less job satisfaction than female respondents. More male respondents also show more dissatisfaction on the work-place environment than the female respondents.

Though some female opined that family women are now finding librarianship more stressful nowadays, a female respondent expressed that “as a nursing mother I have missed my chance of being promoted twice because I couldn’t present enough Journal papers for the promotion exercise. To write is not too easy for me”. This may be true because of the increased role of librarians especially the academic librarians.

It is observed that work-related stress was associated with age. Many younger librarians show more level of work-related stress than the older librarians. Many of the younger librarians show more dissatisfaction about the work-place environment than the older ones. A newly employed librarian expressed that “I don’t know how I will continue to cope with a library environment where I can’t satisfy my client always”. While an older librarian expressed that “things are improving with the new introduction of IT in the library processes and generally things are not all that bad compared with the past period”

Also it was noticed that more education reduces the stress level of library workers. The more they are educated the more they are able to deal with their stress factors; and the easier for them to develop effective coping strategies.

Work Environment

When interviewed about the work-environment stress they perceived in their work-place, the respondents declared that there are inadequate working tools and resources. One of the respondents declared that they don’t have enough and adequate working tools in their own unit. One of them declared that “I am always too tired after the days work especially after carrying books from the ground floor to the fourth floor of the library without the usage of the lift system which has been out of usage for more than twenty years without repairs”. A group declared inadequate number of staff in their unit despite the fact that their unit deal directly with the users. This they declared leads to work overload for them.

Other stress factors declared in the work environment includes ergonomic problem i.e. poor design of instrument used in the work-place affecting their physical health e.g. some data entry staff complain of development of eye problem because of constantly facing the computer screen; developing continuous pain in the neck due to carriage of books from 1st floor to the 4th floor by the circulation staff; poor job incentives or rewards; interaction with other staff i.e. dealing with conservative or bullying colleague and usage of harsh or abusive language.

Personal or Internal Factors

Some individuals recognized the fact that there are different levels of individual stress coping capacity. This they express that it determine the different response of different staff to work-place problem or stress.

Home-Work Interface

Some individual declared that a times home problems and demands erode with their work-place demands causing stress. Some mention the problem of widowhood among the library staff. This was confirmed by the fact that a good number of staff in the library (both male and female) are widow or widowers. One of them described the trauma of widowhood and declared that “it is not easy for an individual to carry the burden of two people”.

Professional/Academic Demand

Some individual especially the academic staff expressed the stress imposed on them in the process of fulfilling the professional demand in giving services and at the same time fulfilling the publication demand as a criterion for promotion. The interface between these two demands poses a serious stress on academic librarians. One of them expressed that “it is not fare on them to require the same number of journal publications with the classroom lecturers as criteria for promotion while the expectation on their eservices is still very high”

Job Security

It was observed that no librarian in the Ibadan University library System exercises any fear about the security of their job.

Job Satisfaction

Most of the staff interviewed show that they have some level of job satisfaction. However more males show job dissatisfaction than the female staff. The older staff also shows more job satisfaction than the younger staff.

Management Problem

Most of the staff interviewed declared that there is no communication problem between the management and the staff though some complained that they have no say in the management of the library. One of the discussants expressed that “every issue is discoursed and finalized at the management meeting”. This comprised of very few top senior officers of the library and they expressed that this may be stressful when they want to air their view about the smooth running of the library.

Managing Stress in a Better Way

Routray and Satpathy (2007) declared that identifying stress and being aware of its effect on our lives require work towards change i.e. managing the source of stress positively and/or changing the library and information science professional’s reaction to it.

From the above findings it is glaring that better stress management with the ever changing library job situation must involve both the individual workers and the organizational effort.

Workers' Role

The individual library and information workers role in avoiding and managing their stress is very important; this will involve three important approaches:

i. identify; ii. Evaluate; iii. Manage.

i. Identifying

It is important for the library and information workers to identify their stressor(s) and the source(s) of the stress. If the stressor and its source are not identified, it can be difficult to evaluate.

ii. Evaluating

1. Evaluate the sources of the stressor by getting to know how the stress was created or formed.
2. Measure the severity and intensity of the symptoms of the stress i.e. determining your body response to this stress. Find out if you are nervous or upset with it.
3. Determine your coping strategy i.e. how you perceive it or take it; how much control you feel you have on it (it is realistic to realize that some events are out of your control); how well you can cope with the stress.
4. Determine the level of your social support.

It is important to note that with good evaluation, a very good management therapy can be arrived at.

iii. Managing

In the face of the situation in the library and information profession, it can be suggested that the best approach to manage the work-place stress in the library is to reduce its effect and to avoid possible stress factor completely as much as possible. These can be achieved by:

1. Changing your perception and beliefs as a librarian about the profession and its stress area. It is logical to note that if the nature, practice and role in a profession are always changing, its stress area will be changing also. It is therefore good to constitute a positive perception and beliefs about the stress area in librarianship. While you are honest and objective with yourself, it is helpful to perceive your so called problems in the library to be challenges which are always never last. However these challenges should neither be ignored nor glossed over.

2. It is also good for librarians to learn to always control their emotional reaction to stress area in librarianship. This can be easily noticed by library users when interacting with them. It is important to note that stress reaction is triggered by the perception of danger, which may be physical and emotional. Emotion can be geared up when conflicting issues like viewing stressors in exaggerated terms, taking difficult stand, making issue a disaster, pleasing everyone, reacting to things viewed as absolutely critical and urgent etc. In such situation, emotion and stress can be perfectly controlled by adopting moderate views, always taking the simplest stand possible, always ready for disaster management, knowing that it is not realistic to always please everyone, putting some situation in perspective and tempering excess emotion, not allowing exaggerations. These can form very strong stress coping resources, as explained by Lazarus model in 1978.

3. It is also important in the library to supply the resources that can reduce or completely remove the stress factors in librarianship. Create a conducive stress-free working environment around yourself as much as it lies within your power, while physical working infrastructure and professional training plays a major role in this area.

Another way to do this is to mix leisure with work. Ferkol (1998) found out that many librarians don't normally have time for leisure, while Nawe (1995) declared that any time set aside for relaxation or leisure purpose after a hard days work is not a wasted time.

Nawe (1995) further recommended that every worker should stay healthy by taking a good sleeping hours in a day; eating good and adequate diet; consulting medical professionals in case of any stress symptoms; constituting positive attitude towards change; managing your time properly; and setting a realistic goal.

It can be noted that time well managed to realize realistic goal is invaluable in reducing stress in any work-place area. There will never be enough time for everything. It is therefore important to always set realistic goals that can be achieved within a time frame, and when you are able to accomplish a set goal, try and celebrate it. This brings you an indelible sense of achievement.

4. It is always a good preventive measure to avoid an identified stressor in your organization as much as possible e.g. it is better to avoid difficult and stressful colleague if possible, while it is better to avoid negative ergonomic equipment if there are alternatives.

Organizational Role

Library and information organization can play a major role in reducing, removing or avoiding work-place

stress for librarians and other information professionals.

Ross and Altmaier (1994) categorize organizational stress interventions in to: role characteristics; job characteristics; interpersonal relationships; organizational structure and climate; and human resource management systems. These can also be applicable to library and information organizations.

Role Characteristics

This is a situation in which workers are made to develop a well defined sense of their job responsibilities, functions and job descriptions. Library organizations should help employees to focus more on the responsibilities or functions. Situations in which workers have a well defined sense of their job responsibilities and descriptions always lead to a decrease in the amount of role ambiguity and conflict encountered (Santer et. al., 1990).

Job Characteristics

This involves organizational strategies in which the design of the job is manipulated to respond to any potential stress discovered. This involves:

Job redesign- which involves changing some aspects of the tasks that are part of a particular job. Often the focus of the redesign is to improve efficiency or effectiveness on the job

Job enrichment- which is described as the redefinition or restructuring of a job to make it more meaningful, challenging and intrinsically rewarding.

Job enlargement- which is a strategy that adds duties or responsibilities to a job without taking any responsibility away from the job. This is normally used to combat role under-load or boredom of repeating a simple task several times for a long time.

Other areas of job characteristics which can also be applied by library organizations include: core job features; Flextime; and job sharing.

Interpersonal Relationship

The quality of relationships that employees have at work has consistently linked to job stress (Payne, 1980). This can be true of librarianship and information profession. These relationships have been understood to be of three types: relationship with co-workers/work groups; relationship with supervisors/leaders; and relationship with clients/customers.

In all these relationships the organization play a major role especially in strengthening these relationship i.e. by creating an atmosphere of trust between the management and workers, between worker and workers, settling rifts, counseling, human relation training, and social support services.

Organizational Structure and Climate

A number of characteristics associated with an organization have been linked to occupational stress. Employee that have more direct control of their work no matter what level they occupy in the organization enjoy their job and have less stress. Also it was also found that the culture of an organization i.e. the beliefs and expectations shared by organizational members can either increase or reduce the stress level of workers.

Human Resource Management Systems

The human resource management system of an organization evolve from the old personnel function, which now reflect a shift from placement of employees alone to a broader focus on employees training; compensation; rewards and benefits; outplacement and diversity concerns.

This has become a very important organizational role in dealing with workplace stress in the library and information profession.

This is due to the fact that library profession is changing methods and role every day, thus the new employees may not fit in properly into the organizational functions if not properly supported by the human resource management system of the organization. Therefore it can be suggested that to deal properly with work-place stress in our libraries a closer look and emphasis be placed on dealing with stressors that individual might encounter in association with:

Entering the work-place by providing good orientation program for new workers in the library to get them familiar with the system and the new technology of the system before allowing them to work alone;

- Adequate on-going on-the-job training through workshops, seminars apprenticeships, job rotations etc;
- Building and maintaining a good mid-career development program so as to avoid stressors like over-promotion, under-promotion, status problem, thwarted ambition and occupational locking-in that always lead to long time work-place stress in library and information profession;
- Providing good performance feedback system which can easily enhance good workers performance and motivation;
- Providing adequate reward for different excellent performance which may or may not include monetary, time-off from work, conference or training aid etc;
- Good organizational competence in handling workers job future ambiguity and insecurity;
- Good organizational competence in providing a stress free job/career transition for workers by giving them adequate training on handling job changing or transitions;
- Providing adequate good entitlement, program and rehabilitation for workers when leaving the work force or retiring. The thought of retirement can constitute a serious work-place stress for workers when there is no good retirement program being looked forward to.

Conclusion

The fast-paced library environment has called for more than what the professionals did in the past both in their personal or professional lives, coupled with the fast development of information technology now being introduced in the profession. These has turned the library and information professional a stress high risk profession. It is simply not easy to remove all sources of stress in the library and information work-place but the organizational managers can manage stress among their teams which will help to reduce some of its consequences in Nigeria. Such best management practices includes creating efficient human resource management systems, having good understanding of the work-place stress and creating an effective supportive culture for workers.

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