

1-19-2019

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Agyei, Dominic Dankwah; Aryeetey, Faustina; Obuezie, Adaora Chigozie; and Nkonyeni, Sixolile, "The prevalence of occupational burnout among librarians in three African countries" (2019). *Library Philosophy and Practice (e-journal)*. 2276.
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The prevalence of occupational burnout among librarians in three African countries

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Abstract

This cross-sectional study was conducted among librarians from Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa to establish the prevalence of occupational burnout in the library set up. A previously validated self-administered questionnaire [Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)] was used to collect information on the prevalence and pattern of job burnout among the respondents. The occurrence of extreme burnout among the respondents, especially those working in the Electronic and Reference Services area of their libraries was found. The findings of this research calls for both professional and personal avenues to deal with or lessen this menace as it is a difficult issue that affects the wellbeing of library staff, which can thwart libraries from accomplishing their points.

Keywords:

Occupational burnout; Librarians; Ghana; Nigeria; South Africa; Maslach Burnout Inventory

1. Introduction

Occupational burnout is a focus of research in business, education, and industry because of its adverse impact on workers (Chaudhry, Khokhar, Waseem, Alvi, & Inam, 2015; Llorent & Ruiz-Calzado, 2016). Work-related burnout affects professionals like clerical workers, supervisors, and others whose work involves problem-solving, mentoring, and those having responsibility over others (Bartlett, 2018). Professionals in the service industry like librarians, bankers, lecturers are also affected. In the library settings, the growing requests for service, steady interferences, under-staffing, and substantial workloads, all join to deliver a perfect domain for burnout (Bartlett, 2018).

Work-related burnout is a mental demeanour that describes the experience of negative disposition and conduct when individuals confront business related stressors (Biglu, 2012). It affects the physical, emotional and mental state, leading to doubts about individuals' competence and the value of their works (Biglu, Abotalebi, & Ghavami, 2016). According to Maslach, Leiter, and Schaufeli (2008), "burnout has three antecedents which comprise emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who do social support work of some kind". Gemlik, Sisman, and Sigrì (2010) explain emotional exhaustion as an antecedent of burnout as the feelings of tiredness, lack of energy and loss of vigour. At the point of emotional exhaustion, a worker candidly feels depleted, emotionally used up and absence of vitality (Hogarth, 2017). Depersonalisation as a component of burnout occurs when librarians show unfeeling and callous response toward patrons of the library (Gemlik *et al.*, 2010). This conduct is characterised by negative or improper disposition toward library users, irritability, loss of idealism, and withdrawal (Maslach *et al.*, 2008). A depersonalised librarian may regard library users as items by utilising deprecatory, hard, or abstract language (Hogarth, 2017). On the other hand, reduced personal accomplishment as an element of burnout refers to a decline in one's feelings of competence and achievement in one's work with people (Gemlik *et al.*, 2010). A library staff who exhibits a reduced personal accomplishment may assess himself contrarily, may experience a lesser feeling of job competence, and may feel an absence of job progress (Hogarth, 2017).

As a result of its health implications, burnout has evolved to become a globalised phenomenon and even medicalised in Sweden and the Netherlands (Schaufeli, Leiter, & Maslach, 2009). Hogarth has averred that burned out librarians often exhibit traits of tiredness, sleeplessness,

nuisances, and/or digestive problems (Hogarth, 2017). Furthermore, it has been asserted that the burned out staff may be exposed to low self-esteem, hopelessness and nervousness (Hogarth, 2017). This does not only affect the burned out worker, but it has a devastating effect on productivity and the family.

Recent studies have reported increased prevalence of occupational burnout in the library settings (Biglu *et al.*, 2016; Chinyere & Ezinwanyi, 2016; Gill, 2017). The librarian is often exposed to enduring work stressors such as technostress (Harwell, 2013; Lindén, Salo, & Jansson, 2018), role ambiguity and role overload (Shupe, Wambaugh, & Bramble, 2015), increased workload (Harwell, 2013), stressful patron relationships (Farler, Gar, & Broady-preston, 2012) and a lack of career prospects (Harwell, 2013). It must be noted that librarianship has long been concerned with the effect that emotion management has on service quality (Matteson & Miller, 2012). As a result, it is important to appreciate the prevalence of burnout among librarians because “the profession, workplace organisational cultures, patron expectations, and societal and generational norms dictate the need for regulating emotions on-the-job” (Matteson & Miller, 2012).

A search through the literature revealed that little is known about the prevalence of burnout among librarians in Africa. The existing studies were notably carried out in Nigeria (Adebayo, Segun-adeniran, Fagbohun, & Osayande, 2018; Ajala, 2011; Ilo, 2016; Okwaraji, 2015). Thus, this study was therefore conducted among librarians in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa with the use of the Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI) (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001) to establish the prevalence of occupational burnout in the library set up. It is expected that the findings of this study will bridge the gap in the literature. Furthermore, it will inform librarians to adopt best practices in managing their emotions so as to increase productivity without compromising their health.

2. Methods and materials

2.1. Study Setting and Population.

This cross-sectional study was conducted among 153 librarians from Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. For a respondent to qualify for this survey, that person had to be a librarian from any of these countries with at least a diploma in any library-related programme, and works in either an academic, public, or special library.

2.2. Study Instruments.

A web-based data collection tool (Google Form) was designed and used to solicit data from respondents. The survey contained two sections. Section one collected data on respondents' demographic characteristics. Section two also contained a previously validated self-administered questionnaire [Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI)] and was used to collect information on prevalence and pattern of job burnout (Maslach *et al.*, 2001).

The MBI scale consisted of 22 items which were divided into three subscales. The first subscale was on Emotional Exhaustion which had 9 items to measure the feelings of being emotionally overrun and exhausted by one's work. The next subscale was Depersonalisation with 5 items that determined the tendency to view others as objects rather than persons with feelings. Lastly, the Personal Accomplishment subscale had 8 items, and it measured the degree to which a person perceives doing well on worthwhile tasks (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2015).

Respondents were asked to indicate responses to the items on a seven-point Likert scale [ranging from 0 (never) to 7 (every day)]. Cumulative scores were calculated for each subscale. For the Emotional Exhaustion and Depersonalisation subscales, a higher score indicated greater burnout. However, for the Personal Accomplishment subscale, which was inversely rated, a higher score meant lesser burnout.

2.3. Statistical Methods

The various MBI sub-ratios were calculated. A high level of burnout was determined by high scores of Emotional Exhaustion, Depersonalisation and a lower score of Personal Accomplishment. The cumulative sums for the various subscales were calculated and were then transformed into "Low," "Moderate" or "High (Das *et al.*, 2015)." See Table 1 for details on the subscale scoring. Total burnout was then calculated by adding the "High" scores of the three subscales. These were then transformed into Extreme Burnout (for those who had more than one "High" score), Fair Burnout (for those who had only one "High" score) and Low Burnout (for those who had no "High" score). See table 3 for details on Total Burnout stratified by the current designation of respondents.

Continuous variables were expressed as their mean \pm standard deviation, whereas categorical variables were expressed as figure and proportion. Comparisons of the general characteristics of the variables were performed using chi-square tests. A level of $P < 0.05$ was considered

statistically significant for all analyses. Microsoft Excel and GraphPad Prism version 6.00 were used for statistical analysis where appropriate.

Table 1: Scores of MBI scale.

Score	Emotional Exhaustion	Depersonalisation	Personal Accomplishment
Low	≤ 17	≤ 5	≥ 40
Moderate	$\geq 18, \leq 29$	$\geq 6, \leq 11$	$\geq 34, \leq 39$
High	≥ 30	≥ 12	≤ 33

2.4. Ethical Considerations

The data was anonymised. Participants voluntarily provided answers to the questions asked after approving an informed consent document that explained the procedures of the study.

3. Results

This survey had 153 respondents comprising of 53 (34.64%) Ghanaians, 51 (33.33%) Nigerians and 49 (32.03%) South Africans. There were 77 (50.33%) males and 76 (49.67%) females with a mean age of 35.49 ± 7.43 years. At the time of the survey, the majority of the respondents were married 88 (57.52%) with children who were one year or older 90 (58.82%). Also, about half of the respondents 75 (49.02%) were having a second degree. Refer to Table 2 for the socio-demographic information of the respondents.

This study revealed that 17 (11.11%) of the respondents were experiencing extreme burnout with the majority of them 6 (13.04%) and 6 (10.53%) working in the Electronic Services section and the Reference Services section respectively. Refer to Table 3 for details on the various levels of burnout experienced by librarians.

Table 2: Socio-demographic and work characteristics of respondents.

Categories	Parameter	Frequency (153)	Percentage (100)
Gender	Male	77	50.33
	Female	76	49.67
Age	< 30yrs	34	24.46
	≥ 30yrs, < 45yrs	90	64.75
	≥ 45yrs	15	10.79
Marital Status	Single	65	42.48
	Married	88	57.52
Respondents with children under 13 years	None	63	41.18
	One or more	90	58.82
Level of Education	Diploma	10	6.54
	First Degree	65	42.48
	Second Degree	75	49.02
	Doctorate	3	1.96
Country	Ghana	53	34.64
	Nigeria	51	33.33
	South Africa	49	32.03
Current Position	Librarian	46	30.07
	Assistant Librarian	48	31.37
	Library Assistant	59	38.56
Current Designation	Acquisitions	50	32.68
	Electronic Services	46	30.07
	Reference Services	57	37.25

Data is presented as figure and percentage. < 30yrs means less than 30 years, ≥ 30yrs, < 45yrs means greater than or equal to 30 years but less than 45 years, ≥ 45yrs means greater than or equal to 45 years.

Table 3: Total Burnout stratified by the current designation of respondents.

Parameter	Total	Acquisitions	Electronic Services	Reference Services
	153(100)	50(32.68)	46(30.06)	57(37.26)
Extreme Burnout	17(11.11)	5(10.00)	6(13.04)	6(10.53)
Fair Burnout	67(43.79)	20(40.00)	22(47.83)	25(43.86)
Low Burnout	69(45.10)	25(50.00)	18(39.13)	26(45.61)

Data is presented as figure and percentage

With regards to the subscales, even though the study did not record any significant difference between the males and females (p -values: 0.8115, 0.7040 and 0.2030 for Emotional Exhaustion, Personal Accomplishment, and Depersonalisation respectively), it was realised that consistently, the male population showed a high prevalence of for Emotional Exhaustion (19.48%), Personal Accomplishment (19.48%) and Depersonalisation (6.58%) than the female population. See Figure 1.

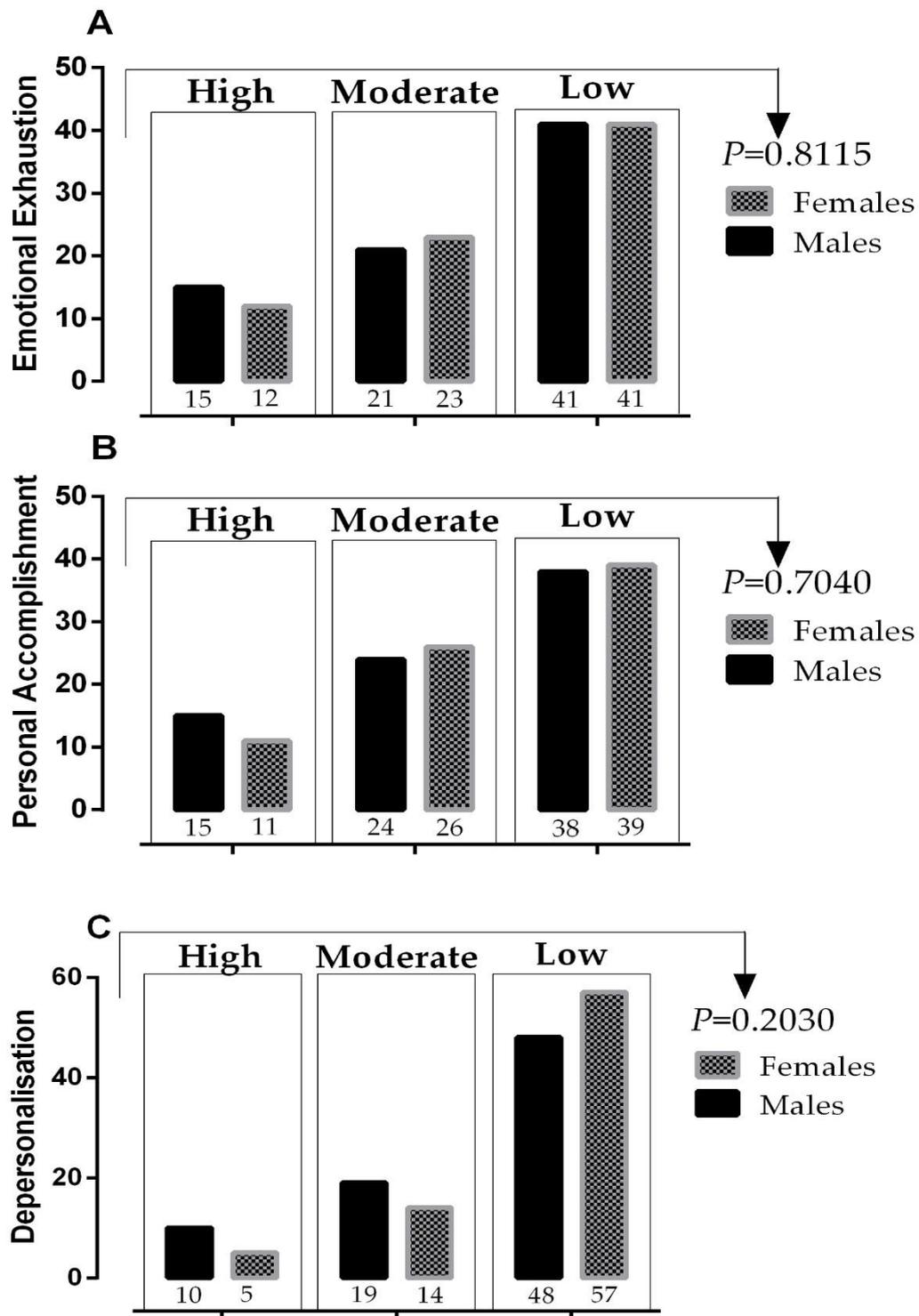


Figure 1: MBI subscales indicating the prevalence of burnout between the male and female population. Data were compared with chi-square tests. P is significant at 0.05.

Generally, there was no significant difference among the study countries with regards to the MBI subscales. There was a record of low prevalence of burnout among the respondents as categorised into countries of study with most of them having low Depersonalisation 105 (68.63%). See Table 4.

Table 4: Prevalence of burnout among respondents from the various countries.

Parameter	Total 153(100)	Ghana 53(34.64)	Nigeria 51(33.33)	South Africa 49(32.03)	<i>P value</i>
Emotional Exhaustion					
High	27(17.65)	12(22.64)	5(9.80)	10(20.41)	
Moderate	44(28.76)	12(22.64)	20(39.22)	12(24.49)	0.2165
Low	82(53.59)	29(54.72)	26(50.98)	27(55.10)	
Personal Accomplishment					
High	26(16.99)	9(16.98)	8(15.69)	9(18.37)	
Moderate	50(32.68)	21(39.62)	13(25.49)	16(32.65)	0.5663
Low	77(50.33)	23(43.40)	30(58.82)	24(48.98)	
Depersonalisation					
High	15(9.80)	5(9.43)	5(9.80)	5(10.21)	
Moderate	33(21.57)	10(18.87)	9(17.65)	14(28.57)	0.6897
Low	105(68.63)	38(71.70)	37(72.55)	30(61.22)	

Data is presented as a figure with the percentage in parenthesis. Categorical data were compared with chi-square tests. P is significant at 0.05.

Regarding the marital status of the respondents, the study brought to light that, except the Personal Accomplishment subscale, the single population was experiencing high burnout under all the subscales. See Figure 2.

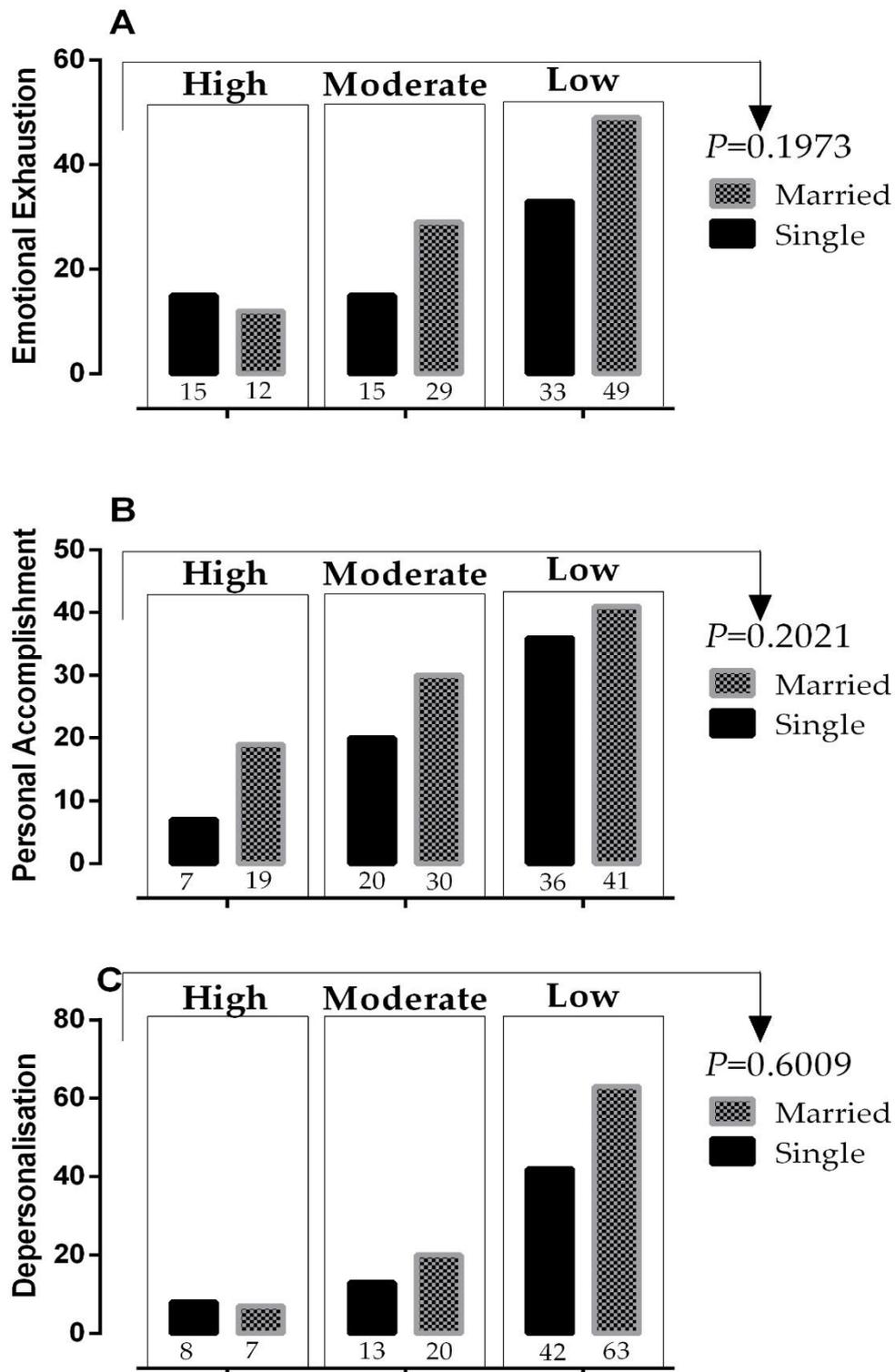


Figure 2: Prevalence of burnout among respondents stratified by marital status. Data were compared with chi-square tests. P is significant at 0.05.

4. Discussion

This study sought to establish the prevalence of occupational burnout in the library set up in Ghana, Nigeria, and South Africa. Generally, the presence of extreme burnout among the participants, particularly among those working in the Electronic and Reference Services section of their libraries was found. This finding is an expression that these librarians were experiencing depletion of emotional resources, cynicism, and indifference about their patrons and feelings of reduced competence (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2015). This finding may be as a result of the help-service nature of the profession where they have greater contact with people (Bartlett, 2018). These professionals work directly with people on a regular basis. Also, the adoption and utilisation of Information and Communication Technology (ICT) by libraries has led to the problem of technostress among library professionals which has developed into a serious problem of job burnout (Vijayakumar & Remy, 2013). This record of occupational burnout in this study is higher than what Al-Dubai and Rampal (2010); Gabbe, Melville, Mandel, and Walker (2002) found in their studies but lower than the findings of (Chaudhry *et al.*, 2015). This disparity in findings may be as a result of the different settings and the professions. Whereas all these studies were conducted among clinicians in Yemen, America, and Pakistan respectively, this study was undertaken among librarians in Africa.

Like the findings of Adebayo *et al.* (2018), this study could not establish any significant relationship between gender and the subscales of MBI. Whiles this finding is similar to what Chaudhry *et al.* (2015) and Khan (2013) reported, it was not similar to what Aftab, Shah, and Mehmood (2012) reported in their studies that females experience more burnout than males. The outcome of this study may be as a result of the hypothesis of differential vulnerabilities which expects women to be more responsive to work stressors than men (Jeon, Choi, & Cho, 2017).

The MBI subscales also revealed the presence of low burnout among the respondents as categorised into countries of study with most of them having low Depersonalisation. Thus, generally, the respondents displayed good interpersonal relations with their patrons, and they were confident in the skills and knowledge they possess and professional librarians. The findings of a study by Shabani, Rezaei Aderyani, Abedi, and Naderi (2012) on occupational burnout of librarians in Isfahan confirm the finding in this study that librarians experience depersonalisation. This finding may be attributed to the fact that most of the professionals in

the library settings are highly educated with the requisite competence to deal with their patrons' needs. Also, most library environments provide a workplace that emphasises collaboration, personal bests, flow, and fairness and according to Hogarth (2017), this can greatly improve engagement and quality in the workplace.

Regarding the prevalence of occupational burnout in the married and single population, it was established that the single population predominantly exhibited more burnout than their married colleagues. The findings of Maslach *et al.* (2001) is in tandem with the findings of this study. According to Maslach *et al.* (2001), "marital status is significantly related to emotional exhaustion and that people who were single or divorced scored higher than married people" (Maslach *et al.*, 2001). Single people are more prone to burnout because unlike married employees are more experienced and tend to have more realistic expectations single workers are more idealistic and are unable to manage their expectations well (Brewer & Clippard, 2002).

5. Conclusion

Generally, the presence of burnout among the participants was found. The results of this study calls for both managerial and personal approaches to reduce this phenomenon as it is a serious problem that affects the health of librarians and in the long run, can hinder libraries from achieving their aims. It is important, therefore, to create an atmosphere that will value and take cognizance of the job roles, personal characteristics and personality factors of library staff to maximise their effectiveness and efficiency in service delivery to library clients without compromising on their health status. It is therefore suggested that librarians should redesign their job roles and also embark on early and regular burnout assessment and intervention to reduce job burnout in the library settings.

Data Availability

The [Excel] data used to support the findings of this study are available from the corresponding author upon request.

Conflict of Interest

The authors declare that there is no conflict of interest regarding the publication of this paper.

Funding Statement

The authors did not receive funding from any institution.

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