Occupational stress in female academic staff working in private and public universities

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ABSTRACT

The present study was aimed to compare occupational stress between female academic staff working in private and public universities. The sampling frame for the study comprised 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. Gumaa Said Yousif (2004) was used to measure occupational stress. There is no significant difference in occupational stress between female academic staff who works in private or public university. There is a significant difference between female academic staff working in public and private universities. It has been concluded that female academic staff working in private universities are vulnerable to burnout in the emotional exhaustion dimension.

Introduction

Stress refers to the body’s psychological, emotional, and physiological responses to any demand that an individual perceives as threatening to the well-being [1]. Stress is defined as physical and emotional reaction to potentially threatening aspects of the environment [2]. Stress may be defined as a psychological and physical reaction to prolonged internal and/or environmental conditions in which an individual’s adaptive capabilities are over extended [3]. Stress is a psychological and physiological response to events that upset our personal balance in some ways in which the signs and symptoms can be caused by other psychological and medical problems; thus, stress can lead to psychological and social problems, including dysfunctional relationships [4]. According to Greenberg [5], stress has been defined as the stimulus or the response or as the whole spectrum of interacting factors but; still others define stress as the combination of stressor and stress reactivity.

Stress is a slippery concept; people sometimes use the word stress to describe threats or challenges, other times to describe responses. Stress is not just a stimulus or a response, it is the process by which we appraise and cope with the environmental threats and challenges [6,7]. Stress is a bodily reaction that can occur in response to either internal cognitive stimuli or external environmental stimuli [8]. Stress is literally in the eye of the beholder; if you perceive a situation to be threatening, you will have to adapt to the threatening circumstances via a stress reaction. This stress reaction is caused by how our mind and body perceive an event, whether consciously or unconsciously, not by the event itself [9]. Stress is a mental and a physical response of our bodies to the changes in our lives [4]. Stress is the negative feelings that occur when people feel they cannot cope with the environment and is thus linked to the way in which people perceive the objective world [10]. Occupational stress is a relatively new phenomenon of modern lifestyle related to stress in the job. According to Girdano, et.al [11], one of the most influential theories of organizational stress has been that of Karasek [12], which yielded a model of occupational stress that posed great value. The present study was aimed to compare occupational stress between female academic staff working in private and public universities.

Materials and methods

Participants

The sampling frame for the study comprised 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. The sources of the data supplied differed from one university to another. Some universities submitted their annual book, or data in the form of up-dated sheets. Others advised to use the university updated...
website. The data for each university was sorted concentrating only on female academic staff. For the purpose of the study, the female academic staffs were classified according to where they work, i.e. in governmental or non-governmental universities. Further classifications were done of both the governmental and non-governmental universities into theoretical and applied colleges to ensure the accuracy of counting female academic staff. From the data supplied, all the faculties of the theoretical colleges of each governmental and non-governmental university were grouped and the numbers of females counted. The same was done with the applied colleges of the governmental and the non-governmental universities. The sampling frame was stratified into enumeration units based on the formula used according to theoretical and applied colleges within both the governmental and the non-governmental universities. A pilot study was conducted and then the researcher selected the participants according to the final number stated for each faculty and with the help and permission of the Dean of the faculty and staff members, the questionnaires were administered to the (306) anonymous female academic staff over a period of two and half month. Female academic staffs were notified of the study and its potential benefits to them.

Tools
Gumaa Said Yousif (2004) was used to measure occupational stress.

Statistical analysis: Data was analyzed by using SPSS 20.0. T test was used to compare the significance of difference.

Results

Table 1: Difference in occupational stress between female academic staff working in private universities and female academic staff working in public universities

| Groups       | Cases | Mean  | Std. Devi. | T-value | Sig  | Conclusion          |
|--------------|-------|-------|------------|---------|------|---------------------|
| Public       | 249   | 59.79 | 12.3       | 0.983   | 0.326| There is no significant difference |
| Private      | 057   | 61.56 | 11.8       |         |      |                     |

The finding of this hypothesis shows that there is no significant correlation between occupational stresses among female academic staff working in either public or private universities.

Table 2: Difference in burnout between female academic staff working in private universities and female academic staff working in public universities

| Burnout Dimensions | Groups | Cases | Mean  | Std. Devi. | T-value | Sig  | Conclusion |
|--------------------|--------|-------|-------|------------|---------|------|------------|
| Emotional exhaustion| Public | 249   | 22.5  | 5.25       | 3.05    | 0.002| There is a significant difference |
|                    | Private| 057   | 24.8  | 4.65       |         |      |            |
| Depersonalization  | Public | 249   | 5.25  | 2.23       | 1.27    | 0.204| There is no significant difference |
|                    | Private| 057   | 5.67  | 2.09       |         |      |            |
| low accomplishment | Public | 249   | 20.1  | 2.5        | 0.567   | 0.571| There is no significant difference |
|                    | Private| 057   | 20.3  | 2.6        |         |      |            |
| Total              | Public | 249   | 54.6  | 7.7        | 2.84    | 0.005| There is a significant difference |
|                    | Private| 057   | 57.7  | 7.3        |         |      |            |

The finding of this hypothesis shows that there is a significant difference in the burnout dimensions among female academic staff according to type of university in which they work. It is found that female academic staff in private universities has burnout in the emotional exhaustion dimension.

Discussion

The finding of this hypothesis shows that there is no significant correlation between occupational stresses among female academic staff working in either public or private universities. To explain this hypothesis in the light of some previous studies, the researcher found it was partially related to the study of Mohammed Al-Dusugi (1998), which found that in comparing the teaching profession with other profession, it was found that teachers perceived occupational stress more than the telephone exchange staff. The study of Gianakos [13] found that high femininity and female gender are predictive of direct action. In addition, Lefton [14], suggested that when people are confronted with the same potentially stress-inducing situation, some may experience stress, where as others may not; because of the individual’s cognitive appraisals. The study of McGowan, et.al. (2006) revealed that threat appraisal was positively associated with emotion-focused coping but not with distress and subjective experience. Moreover, the survey conducted by Swiss and Walkers [15], among female Harvard Business, Law and Medical school in work and family dilemma, revealed that 85$\%$ of the 902 female Harvard working women believed
that reducing hours of work is detrimental to women career as a way to cope with stressors at work. The researcher suggests that a female academic staff perceives and appraises the occupational stresses and by means of past experience of events or situations she successfully apply coping techniques that strengthen her or simply utilizes a new strategy that adds more to her coping skills. These professional females are able to deal with occupational stresses on their job with whatever strategy they believe is required for the resolution of a stressful situation or event. In addition the researcher thinks that causes and potential sources of occupational stress for female academic staff working in either public or private universities are the same, therefore, no significant difference was found between them; which may imply that occupational stress among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state is not according to working in a public or a private university.

**Conclusion**

There is no significant difference in occupational stress between female academic staff who works in private or public university. There is a significant difference between female academic staff working in public and private universities. It has been concluded that female academic staff working in private universities are vulnerable to burnout in the emotional exhaustion dimension.

**Conflicts of interest:** Nil

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