THE RELATIONSHIP BETWEEN STRESS LEVELS AND THE JOB GRADE OF MEMBERS OF UNIVERSITY NON-ACADEMIC STAFF IN KENYA

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Cite this article in APA
Ombati, M. P. (2022). The relationship between stress levels and the job grade of members of university non-academic staff in Kenya. Journal of education management and leadership, 1(1), 8-12. https://doi.org/10.51317/jeml.v3i1.113

Abstract
The relationship between stress levels and the job position (grade) of the non-academic staff members at Egerton University Njoro Campus was the purpose of this study. Stress affects an individual’s physical and mental health, performance and interpersonal relationships. This study involved a survey of 100 non-teaching staff of the Njoro Campus. A proportionate random sample was obtained after the stratification of employees by cadre and gender. Questionnaires were pre-tested, and necessary modifications were implemented before the actual data collection. Data on employee personal traits, job cadre, educational background, attitude to work and stress coping strategies were collected using a questionnaire and self-report test. Data collected were analysed by use of descriptive and inferential statistics. The study established that job position does not influence the level of stress of non-academic employees. There is a need to establish a staff-support centre at the University, where employees can be offered emotional and psychological support through professional counselling. Another study can be carried out to generalise the findings of this study in similar institutions with caution.

Key terms: Relationship, stress levels, job position, Non-Academic Staff.
1.0 INTRODUCTION
Stress is a major concern in human life. This is perhaps due to its role in determining how human beings relate, work and interact with each other. Insecurity, lack of confidence and withdrawal tendencies associated with stress lead to lack of performance, poor working relations and indulgence in unhealthy relationships among the workers. Stress is invisible, but its effects are great. Unexplained interpersonal misunderstanding, infighting and industrial action by members of staff have become a common phenomenon not only at Egerton University but also in other Kenyan public universities. No study has been carried out to explain the role of stress in interpersonal relationships and work performance in Kenya and, in particular, within the public universities. This study established the impact of stress on work and interpersonal relationships among the non-teaching staff, which was the main cause of employees' discontent with one another as well as with the management of the University: a case of Egerton University Kenya.

A study carried out in America revealed that the following factors accounted for differences in job stress at the workplace, gender, level of employee in an organization, income of the employee, occupation and family situation (Long, 1995). The survey found that more and more workers were reporting that their jobs are very stressful and that they are burned out, hence poor interpersonal relationships with their colleagues, families and their bosses. Some of the examples of personal characteristics that determine behaviour include personality traits, attitudes, beliefs, cognition and the environment. The surroundings influence people with regard to learning, motivation and performance (Mitchell & Larson, 1987). Every living being experiences stress, including animals. To some extent, a certain amount of stress is necessary in order to accomplish set goals. A complete absence of stress means death (Melgosa, 2001). Selye (1956) points out that stress is the adverse physical and emotional reactions to demands put on the individual by upsetting unsettling conditions or experiences called stressors. Stress impacts negatively on the quality of an individual's output and on how one relates with others. On the other hand, excessive stress can cause adverse consequences to human life. Stress is a common factor leading to diseases, and many people are suffering and being treated for stress-related complications (Melgosa, 2001).

2.0 LITERATURE REVIEW
Stress is not limited to life and death situations. It can be positive or negative, although only its negative tends to be emphasized. The good things that happen to us, as well as bad ones, cause stress because they carry with them adductive demands that require change or adaptation if an individual is to meet his or her needs (Morris, 1988). According to Selye (1956), "a complete absence of stress means death. A limited amount of stress is necessary in order to accomplish goals and projects".

Powell (2000) states that when perceived demands outweigh capabilities, there is an imbalance, and one begins to suffer physical and emotional symptoms. The symptoms manifested, particularly in the body, are determined by the family background and genetic temperaments. Powell continues to state that it is important to remember that any stress one experiences are a result of one's interpretation of the demands and capabilities themselves. He has outlined several signs. He starts by talking about a panic attack. He states that a panic attack is triggered by an overload of stresses, worries and life events that reverberate between one's conscious mind and unconscious mind. This can make one experience frightening symptoms, which causes the body to react to fight/flight. Another sign of stress is hyperventilation. This is irregular breathing in which one breathes more quickly than usual. This can result in too much oxygen and
too little carbon dioxide, which can alter the acidity in the bloodstream, which could cause dizziness, shaking, sweating and tension.

Powell gives another sign of stress, and that is obsessive behaviour. This means that one is prone to intrusive, worrying, repetitive and often nonsensical thoughts. He states that in an attempt to neutralize or put right such thoughts, one may develop ritualistic behaviours or compulsions, such as repetitive washing of hands, counting or hoarding (Powell, 2000). Stress has two origins. These are internal and external factors. Internal factors include one’s personality, temperaments and level of one’s self-control. External factors include environment, job, family or studies. Melgosa (2001), states that when the external stress is particularly strong, even the best-equipped people suffer stress. On the other hand, when someone is psychologically fragile, even the weakest stress factors affect him or her.

Stress in the workplace can originate from various sources or a single source. In addition, stress impacts both employees and employers alike. As stated by the Canadian health association: fear of job redundancy, lay-offs brought about by economic uncertainties, and increased demands for overtime due to staff cutbacks act as negative stressors (Tooley, 1996). Workers who are pressurized to perform can get caught in a downward spiral of increasing efforts to attain the set targets without motivation. The continuous requirement to work at optimum performance takes its toll on job satisfaction. Job dissatisfaction, employee turnover, reduced efficiency, sickness, drug abuse, internal competition and conflicts, demotivation and poor decisions are all by-products of an over-stressed workplace. Job position does not influence the level of stress in the place of work (Borthwick, 1996). This sentiment concurs findings of this study. According to Gherman (1981), the following factors cause stress in the work environment. Job overload, lack of job description, taboos, job fit, production quota, communication breakdown, involuntary transfers, delayed salary, poor working conditions, lack of job satisfaction, unrealistic expectations and poor relationships among workers.

3.0 RESULTS AND DISCUSSION
The results indicate that job position (grade) is not a significant factor in causing stress. This means that the job position does not influence the level of stress of employees, as indicated in table 1 below. T-test results show that none of the items was significant at ≤ 0.05. The level of stress is not dependent on the job position of the employee. This means that all the employees are likely to become stressed irrespective of their grades. These findings differ from the observations of Long (1995), who stated that the level of an employee in an organization is a factor that accounts for stress differences. Similarly, Tooley (1996) points out that employee’s level in an organization, together with the task designated for the levels, work roles, management style and career concerns such as job security, promotion and advancement, lead to stress.

| Variables                  | Std. Error | Std. Coeff. | t-test | Sig.  |
|----------------------------|------------|-------------|--------|-------|
| Feel pressurized            | 0.115      | 0.085       | 0.565  | 0.574 |
| Feel emotionally drained    | 0.105      | 0.038       | 0.258  | 0.797 |
| Relating with others        | 0.101      | 0.061       | 0.454  | 0.651 |
| Stressful assignment        | 0.106      | 0.16        | 1.034  | 0.305 |
| Stressful work environment  | 0.104      | 0.097       | 0.705  | 0.483 |
| Ignored at work             | 0.106      | -0.184      | -1.279 | 0.205 |
| Come late to work           | 0.108      | 0.131       | 1.000  | 0.321 |
Upon further analysis, the results of the F-test, as indicated in Table 1, confirmed that there were no differences in the level of stress between the two cadres of employees.

| Not tempted                              | 0.082 | -0.149 | -1.164 | 0.249 |
|------------------------------------------|-------|--------|--------|-------|
| Valued at work by colleagues             | 0.076 | -0.136 | -0.901 | 0.371 |
| My voice goes high                       | 0.119 | -0.09  | -0.63  | 0.531 |
| Problem communicating with colleagues    | 0.118 | 0.112  | 0.889  | 0.377 |
| No confidence at work                    | 0.135 | 0.157  | 1.234  | 0.222 |
| Satisfied with the level of achievement  | 0.056 | 0.065  | 0.497  | 0.621 |
| Go for vacation                          | 0.101 | -0.007 | -0.057 | 0.954 |
| Do not like greeting friends             | 0.161 | 0.131  | 0.935  | 0.353 |

The findings indicate that there is no difference between the two grades of employees as far as the level of stress was concerned. Therefore, job position (grade) does not increase the level of stress significantly.

4.0 CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

**Conclusion:** This study was to establish the relationship between stress levels and the job position (grade) of the non-academic staff members at Egerton University Njoro Campus. According to the findings here, the researcher concluded that job position (grade) does not influence the level of stress of non-academic employees of Egerton University. The results revealed that the employees are equally stressed regardless of the job position (grade) given the same stressor.

**Recommendation:** The researcher, therefore, recommends that in-service and refresher courses on time management, financial management, and communication skills, among others, should be offered regularly to non-teaching staff.

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