

WORKPLACE STRESS, WELL-BEING AND SUSTAINABLE PERFORMANCE OF ACADEMIC STAFF IN PUBLIC UNIVERSITIES**Dr. Nworgu, Kelechi Godson***Email:nworgugodson10@gmail.com, +234-8037238904***Department Of Employment Relations and Human Resource Management, Faculty of Social and Management Sciences, Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe University, Ideato, Imo State, Nigeria****Abstract**

The study investigated workplace stress, well-being and sustainable performance of academic staff in public universities. The objectives of this study are to examine how the mental health outcomes of workplace stress can impair the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities, investigate how workplace stress can affect the physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities, and to explore workplace stress coping strategies for sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities. The study adopted Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) transactional stress and coping theory. However, the cross-sectional research design, and random sampling technique were also utilized in administering structured questionnaire to respondents in three public universities in Imo State. The data retrieved were analyzed and presented on tables in percentage. Findings of the study shows that there are mental health outcomes of workplace stress on the physical health and well-being of academic staff, and that workplace stress coping strategies can enable sustainable job performance of academic staff. Based on the findings, management in public universities should provide good welfare and health services for the care of the mental health, work stability, well-being as well as the quality functioning of academic staff in public universities. Government should provide public universities with ultra-modern health facilities that can freely handle all physical health problems and well-being of academic staff in public universities. Academic employees should avoid negative workplace coping strategies, and adopt the positive coping strategies that effectively and efficiently support sustainable job performance in public universities.

Keywords: Workplace, Stress, Well-being, Sustainable Performance, Academic Staff**Introduction**

Workplace stress are the negative emotional and physical consequences of work demands that exceed an employee's capacity and well-being to cope with job demands and job performance. It is the work pressures and challenges that usually leads to experiencing a feeling of being depressed and overwhelmed with heavy workloads that have consequences on both the mental health, physical health, and well-being of workers. In addition, it refers to the negative experiences between work demands and individual's ability to cope with the pressures of work that is not compatible with employee's knowledge, available resources, and ability to cope in the mastering of things at workplace within a limited time and schedule (World Health Organization, 2024; Burman & Goswami, 2018). Workplace stress is the result of harmful emotional and physical responses that usually occur when there is dispute between work demands on employee's ability and control over work demands in subjection of the employees' health and well-being, and as the case may be. Therefore, the combination of job pressures and the incapability of workers to have mastery over work at work location refers to workplace stress.

The multiple work demands and requirement for quality work performance from university teachers poses greater stress factor on university academic staff. This disposition persist overtime and has been perceived to have significant effect on increasing the number of stressors that can affect academic staff well-being and better functioning in recent times. Perhaps, due to the insufficient staff strength at the federal universities across Nigeria, multiple teaching roles and courses are assigned to most lecturers with insignificant compensations (Fontinha et. al., 2019). In addition, the

competing tasks and multistage responsibilities and multiple roles played by university teachers in campus environments are, teaching, marking of scripts, assessment of student's performance, research writings, and articles publication puts them in a tense and stressful condition (Singh, Cross, Munro, & Jackson, 2020). Workplace stress can have significant effect on the emotion, mental health and physical well-being of university academic staff (Holton et. al., 2016). Well-being of lecturers have been viewed to be an increasingly critical factor that should be given adequate attention in the university environment (Achour, Azmi, Isahak, Nor, & Yusoff, 2019). On this perspective, well-being denotes how individuals evaluate their health, lives in terms of how they are satisfied with life, work and health conditions, positive emotions as well as the absence of negative emotions and feeling on workloads.

The work demands and insufficiency of academic staff in lecturing job in federal universities in Nigeria has deeply contributed to the alarming level of stress within Nigerian Universities. Furthermore, university lecturers often engage in administering students' continuous assessment, examinations, tabulation of scores, attendance of conferences, workshops, seminars, research, publish articles in journals, and in social, religious and political engagements. These activities fume out intolerable levels of stress that can affect the physical, mental health, well-being and job performance of academic staff of universities (Niemi & Valniomaki, 2013). Teaching has always been complexed in educational settings, as it is also linked with competencies and abilities of teachers who acquired credible qualification in their professional and academic careers. However, the outcome of most teaching activities in universities has been high stress on academic staff (Chaudhry, 2012).

The public universities in Nigeria appears to be facing shortage in workforce as there has been embargo on recruitment of lecturers. This situation has series of challenges bedeviling the few academic staff who are left with complex roles in the federal university educational system that exist presently. In addition, the continuous and ever-present stressors attach health problems on employees on the job, and this tends to lower the overall performance of the academic staff. Furthermore, employee's performance is a clear indicator and expectation that reveals the extent to which a worker achieves stipulated organizational goals. Therefore, academic staff performance in most federal universities across Nigeria appears to have declined by multitasks roles bestowed on academic staff as well as other stress related issues such as inadequate power, lack of needed support from colleagues and management, excess workloads, family conflict, and poor remuneration. The inadequacies of management assistance to academic staff in federal universities make the individuals feel frustrated when they fail to secure guidance while been encumbered with much responsibility. Renn (2018) found that the rates of stress, anxiety, and depression for academic workers in university increased in relation to the general workforce. It was found that 50% of lecturers were absent due to health and well-being issues, and 44% incurred high and regular health expenditure due to teachers' ill-health every year in United Kingdom (Health & Safety Executive [HSE], 2019).

Adenuga (2015) found that stress causes work discontentment among university teachers. Moreso, it was observed that most academic workers have some level of dysfunction as an effect of stress, which also impacts on their work performance negatively. It was observed that academic workers experienced high workplace stress in universities (Singh, Cross, Munro, & Jackson, 2020). In a study by Education Support (2019), it was found that 72% of university teachers were stressed at workplace, while 63% were weighing the option of existing their current place of work. However, in Australia and New Zealand, academic employees in universities experience low work satisfaction and performance due to the impacts of stress (Tham & Holland, 2018). On the well-being of academic workers in universities, some studies have shown that there is decline in the health and well-being of university teaching staff (Qudah, Davies, & Deakin, 2019).

It has been found that stressed academic workers had high risk of mental health issues, such as anxiety risk, substance abuse as well as depression that limit better functioning capacities at workplace. It was found that stress contribute to certain work mistake made by academic staff. In

addition, other experiences of stress outcomes found were the spending of more time on tasks, effect of poor work quality, burnout, resentment, impaired social functioning, anger, low morale to doing work, and low level of work performance. Furthermore, it was found that there are health problems that are related with work stress. A study carried out by (Catano et. al., 2010) on stress and mental health of academic staff found that 13% of academics showed psychological and emotional distress in some Canadian federal universities. High workplace stress of academic workers was found to have a correlation with mental health condition in universities in Canada (Kinman, 2016). However, the study by (Tavares et. al., 2012) found that some academic professors had high stress experience in the universities, while others experienced mild psychiatric or mental disorders as other 43% of academic workers had poor mental health conditions in universities in China (Li & Kou, 2018). In another report, 50% academic individuals had minor level of work anxiety due to stressful condition. But 49% of academic employees in Pakistan universities experienced some degree of trauma, social dysfunction, emotional problems and depression (Khan et. al., 2016). Against this background, it is pivotal to investigate circumstances that relate to stress conditions and outcomes management for the physical health, mental health, well-being and work performance of academic staff in federal universities. Therefore, this study seeks to investigate how workplace stress impacts on the quality functioning of some academic staff of university of Port Harcourt as well as the physical and mental health for individuals' well-being and sustainable performance of academic employees in the federal university.

Objectives of the study are:

1. To examine how the mental health outcomes of workplace stress can impair the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities.
2. To investigate how workplace stress can affect the physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities.
3. To explore workplace stress coping strategies for sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities.

Research Questions

1. What are the mental health outcomes of workplace stress that impair the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities?
2. How does workplace stress affect the physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities?
3. What are the workplace stress coping strategies for sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities?

Hypotheses:

1. There is no significant relationship between mental health outcomes of workplace stress and the impairment of the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities.
2. There is no significant relationship between workplace stress, physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities.
3. There is no significant relationship between coping strategies and sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities.

Workplace Stress, Mental Health Outcomes, and Quality Functioning

Workplace stress as a complex phenomenon to humans comes with tense conditions to employee's mental health and quality functioning. Stress have been drawing attention of people in several organizations over the years (Suleiman & Akinsanya, 2011). According to (Alabi, Mulala & Lawal, 2012), it connotes the pressure mostly originating from work environment and work roles in workplaces. However, it can also be termed as work strains on employees (Michie, 2015). Furthermore, workplace stress is described as the body's immediate response to work conditions and work environments that comes with vehement consequences on individuals' behaviour, physical, emotional, and mental health. In addition, stress can be any situation that can disturb or distort the natural equilibrium or pace of the human body functioning, causing emotional disarray, physical

injury, anxiety, deprivation, trauma, momentary mental imbalance as well as associated diseases (Arikewuyo, 2004).

Mental health issues have often been perceived as a psychological condition of individuals well-being, sense of articulation, self-coordination, purposeful functioning in life, sense of self-acceptance, and having conscious positive ability and cordial relations with people (Adenuga, 2015). Furthermore, mental health places individuals to self-adjustment in society as to have a better or quality functioning on the multifaced realities of life, work and effective functioning in other to have satisfactory, cheerful as well as acceptable work behaviour. It is also perceived that individuals experiencing mental illness always display certain behaviour of incapacitation such as failure to believe in what they capable of doing, having distrust on others, inability to quell daily challenges of life as well as having difficulty in relating to people. Therefore, Adenuga (2015) opines that for a good mental health, there is need to verify the individuals' character on having the ability to handle pressures at workplace, forgive self on mistakes done, consideration of people's interest, containing self-interest, showing respect to people, acknowledging others opinions, recognizing individual's rights as well as handling issues amicably as they come. Such person must have to believe in self as well as the pursuit in work ideals, planning, setting achievable goals, make rational decisions through positive thinking, have proper relaxation and enough resting time.

Mental health is the embodiment of neurophysiological conditions as well as a cognitive status that connote behaviour, mood, emotion, feeling, and thinking. Meanwhile, there has been the argument that mental well-being of individuals can have either a positive or negative sides (Franke, Hüffmeier, Montano & Reeske, 2017). However, the positive side of mental well-being refers to a state of positive individual cognitive functioning as person in such condition can show the capacity to handle hard situation effectively. In other words, the negative side reflects the psychological condition of distress or psychiatric disorder. Furthermore, the positive or negative dimensions of mental health is rooted on social, biological, psychological and neurophysiological factors that expand from life experiences, work environment, quality of life and work, self- esteem, nutrition, and physical activities (Franke et. al., 2017). Chu (2017) argued that mental health and well-being refers to the effective state of the cognitive functioning of individuals that enables their productivity in day-to-day activities. To this end, individuals in this condition act positively, show interpersonal skills, and mastery of coping with life difficulties.

According to Chu (2017) in the past decades, mental health was considered as the absence of mental illness, however, research has demonstrated that many people who are free of mental illness do not function adequately. Moreso, mental health does not only imply the absence of mental illness, it also imbibes the effective ability of individuals productivity in relation to work roles in the midst of potential stress factors and work life. There is more evidence that majority of employees in workplaces manifest certain mental illnesses such as depression, anxiety, cognitive disorder, eating disorder, emotional distress as well as social disorder which places individuals in disability in coping with occupation, and which results to social and work isolation (Borritz et. al., 2014).

Research have shown how mental health can contribute individuals' disability as well as mortality (Borritz et. al., 2014). Meanwhile, non-accidental, accidental and psychological injuries are associated with mental health. However, certain social, physical, environmental, and economic factors can determine the mental health status of individuals (Borritz et. al., 2014). Furthermore, the physical well-being of employees at workplace can be viewed as an important determinant in developing a better mental well-being. In addition, employee's mental health can be measured on the basis of the interactivity of certain factors surrounding the mental health in a more complex and multifaceted work conditions. Therefore, the physical health consequences can affect the mental health outcomes of individuals, whereas the mental health on the other hand can complicate health seeking behaviours and healthy lifestyle of workers in organization (Fekete, Siegrist & Tough, 2017). An employee's mental health can signal positive impacts, and enhance quality functioning. There is the argument that asserts that the mental health of an employee can make or mar the quality functioning of employees. This perception has been consistent overtime. The happy-functioning and

productive workers mental health is connected to the individual's workplace functioning (Luthans et. al, 2007), and however, some studies affirms that poor mental health of workers can negatively influence their well-being, (Kniffin et. al., 2020). Furthermore, the quality of individuals working life in public universities can be low or high, depending on the mental health conditions that predisposes the quality of work life balance in the workplace (Collinson, 2018). In essence, the reduction of adverse impact of stress on mental health can offer appropriate functioning of the employees (Darabi, Macaskill, & Reidy, 2017), thereby protecting academics in public universities from having further stress while promoting their well-being for quality functioning (Aquino, Lee, Spawn, & Bishop-Royse, 2018).

The mental health main outcomes of stress affecting academics are of various categories. Several scholars have observed that academics often experience stress due to multiple work roles, and the results of such condition among others can include mental or psychological distress in public universities (Catano et. al., 2010). Therefore, intense levels of workplace stress outcomes affecting academics come with higher levels of mental health disorder (Kinman, 2016). According to (Tavares et. al., 2012; Li & Kou, 2018; Khan et. al., 2016) high stress levels in public university promotes the chances of individuals psychiatric disorders, anxiety, social dysfunction and depression. The prevalence of these depressive symptoms can outrightly affect the quality functioning and physical well-being of academics.

Physical Health and Well-being of Academic Employees

Good physical health is referred to the body system that function properly, free from significant or terminal illness. It is a physical condition also free from injury, that have energy for work as well as feeling satisfied with daily tasks (Dodge et. al., 2012). Furthermore, physical health is a state of an individual health and well-being that specifically enable the performance of occupation demands. It also connotes physical wellness. However, it is not just the absence of disease or sickness, but the overall wellness of the physical body to having the capability to perform work activities. Moreover, the physical well-being of employees enhances the way individuals performs at workplace and handle in their work-life balance. Physical health aids human development, well-being, and work task. Moreso, individuals with improved physical health and well-being can have positive effect on daily work roles and can influence others at the workplace.

Employees well-being is a very important factor that is demanded by academics in the execution of their academic responsibilities at public universities (Achour, Azmi, Isahak, Nor, & Yusoff, 2019). It enables individuals to evaluate their work roles and performance and emotions at the workplace. The well-being of academics fosters presenteeism, and decreases absenteeism at the universities. But in recent times, there appears to be a decrease in the well-being of university academic staff (Qudah, Davies, & Deakin, 2019). In another dimension, there are several negative factors that affects employee well-being in every organization (Zheng et. al., 2016). For Obrenovic et. al., (2020), the failure to address the causes of negative employee physical well-being can frustrate the performance of employees, and hamper work progress at the workplace. Furthermore, the factors that can obstruct employee's well-being, particularly in universities may include heavy workload, illness, diseases, poor remuneration, stress, family burdens, and workplace conflict (van Niekerk & van Gent (2021).

A decrease in the well-being of employees would result to having decrease in their ability to cope conscientiously with the workplace stressors. Hence, it should be a priority to pay more attention to the physical and psychological well-being of workers since it has the efficacy to influence and impact on the employee's work behaviour, workplace interaction, decision making, even as it can constantly to affect the work and family life as well as social life (Rasulzada, 2007). According Briner (2002), the workplace environment can be another cause of physical health and psychological challenges that can affect physical well-being. However, the contributory factors that are associated with the workplace environment can be the postures on the use of equipment or machineries, heat, machinery noise, or poor lightning condition which can affect the psychological and emotional work

processes. In addition, other environmental factor can be the nature of the job, the ability to perform, task repetitiveness, heavy workloads. These factors are some that mostly influence the physical well-being of academics.

Stress Coping Strategies and Sustainable Job Performance of Academic Staff

Academics require the adoption of strategies that can assist in coping with workplace stress (Melancon, 2014). Having the right perception on stress management can position such individual to profitable outcomes. The strategies that can offer relieve during stress may include time management, physical activities, watching movies, and request for assistance at work place. These coping strategies can help to lower workplace stress, protect physical health, mental health, and well-being of academic staff (Fadel et. al., 2019). Furthermore, there are negative approaches to coping strategies which certain academics stick to in other to cope with stress. Some resort to smoking, alcohol consumption, unhealthy diet, and substances misuse (Ruisoto, Vaca, López-Goñi, Cacho, & Fernández-Suárez, 2017). According to (Holton, Barry, & Chaney, 2016), academics most frequently use maladaptive coping strategies such as drinking of alcohol and using sedative drugs. However. the use of alcohol and drugs among academics appears to be common, and it is a negative coping approach thought to reduce work stress Sattler, Sauer, Mehlkop, & Graeff (2013). The use of drugs can be seen by some academics as a beneficial approach to mitigating difficulties of work stress in modern work environments. The physical and mental health as well as the emotional well-being of academics are critical factors to sustainable job performance in the universities.

Sustainable job performance in university work environment refers to the consistent approach to sustain high levels of employee's performance through the ability to integrate social, economic, and environmental requirements into the institution's leadership, strategy, and work. It is ensuring that individuals do not only accomplish their various work goals nor attain their expectations or achieve university's goals, but also supporting the well-being of the academic staff. Furthermore, it considers the positive contributions to institutional, environmental and general goals in society without compromising individuals' well-being. It is important to achieve surpassing levels of the well-being of academics to improve job performance (Pagan-Castano et. al., 2021).

Sustainable job performance connotes the sustaining of effective and efficient approaches to work. It is work performance of employees to work tasks (Chandrasekara, 2019). However, it is the connection of task performance and employee's ability to achieve core tasks, making contributions to the university environment and co-workers through teamwork for collective development and growth (Salam, 2020). Coping with workplace stress can make the individual to improve on job performance. However, certain stressors such as personal, work and family levels can negatively affect job performance (Pandey, 2018). Job performance is multidimensional in its linkage with individual context and the organizational requirement. Therefore, the improvement of job performance may require the employees' characteristics and organizational expectations.

In consideration of sustainable job performance in universities, it is a major prerogative for the academic staff support the improvement of institution by being committed to work roles and performance tasks, and to regularly ensure that there are no lapses to work (Inyang, 2016). Job performance of academics entails further, work delivery time, reduction on wastages, and enhancement on delivery of quality services (Kenton, 2019). To properly enhance job performance of academics' staff, an enabling workplace such as conducive work environment and climate, individuals' well-being, physical health and welfare requirements remain vital factors. Academics can be more efficient and effective where the workloads are less stressful, the work environment is conducive, and employee's wellness is valued (Armstrong, 2012). At this point, the workers can sustainably perform effectively. Therefore, placing value to the physical health, mental health, and the overall well-being of academic staff can ensure sustainable job performance in public universities (Nwachukwu, 2009).

Theoretical Framework

The study adopts Lazarus & Folkman's (1984) theory known as Transactional Stress and Coping Theory (TTSC). This theory is widely recognized as stress and coping model (Lee & Roberts, 2018) because it believes that stress is a transaction between an employee and the workplace (Folkman, Lazarus, Gruen, & DeLongis, 1986). However, TTSC was also viewed as intrapersonal processes that considers stress, coping strategy and its association to personal health and overall well-being of workers (Lee & Roberts, 2018). Therefore, persistent stress can lead to illness and other related poor health conditions, particularly where there is absence of coping resources, adequate strategies as well as the use of other ineffective strategies to cope with work related stressors (Hendy, Can, & Black, 2019). To this end, TTSC emphasis is on effective stress and coping strategies to attaining good physical health, mental health and overall well-being of academic staff (Walinga, 2010). This theory has provided a theoretical underpinning and relative relationship to this study.

Materials and Method

The cross-sectional survey design was adopted in collecting data from three (3) public universities, which include, Kingsley Ozumba Mbadiwe university Ideato, Federal university of technology Owerri and Imo State university Owerri all in Imo State. A sample of 87 lecturers were selected using random sampling technique from 8 faculties of the three public universities. Structured questionnaires were administered to the 87 respondents of the study. Retrieved data were analyzed and presented on tables in percentage, mean and standard deviation.

Results and Discussions

Ho 1. There is no significant relationship between mental health outcomes of workplace stress and the impairment of the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities.

Table 1: Summary of responses, calculated mean and standard deviation for mental health outcomes of stress and impairment for quality functioning of academic staff of public universities

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean (SD)
Depression	15		17.2
Feeling overwhelmed	58		66.7
Anxiety	14		16.1
Total	87		100
Mental health outcome:			Mean (SD) score 19.78 (7.44)

Source: Nworgu (2025)

Table 1 shows that 15 (17.2%) respondents had depression, 58 (66.7%) felt overwhelmed, and 14 (16.1%) experienced anxiety as the mental health outcomes of workplace stress that affected their quality functioning at the universities. The mean and standard deviation scores for all the mental health outcomes are 19.78 and 7.44 respectively. This indicates that all the respondents agree to having workplace stress outcomes at the public universities. Therefore, the study stands to accept that there are workplace stress outcomes among academic staff in public universities, and the study rejects the null hypotheses that there is no significant relationship between workplace stress and mental health outcomes in public universities.

Ho 2. There is no significant relationship between workplace stress, physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities.

Table 2: Summary of responses calculated mean, and standard deviation on workplace stress, physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities.

Variables	Frequency	Percent	Mean (SD)
Physical health	68	78.2	
Well-being	19	21.8	
Total	87	100	
Physical well-being score			4.98 (4.04)

Source: Nworgu (2025)

Table 2 reveals that 68 (78.2%) respondents agree that physical health has a relationship with workplace stress, and 19 (21.8%) agree that the well-being of academic staff are affected by

workplace stress. The physical health and well-being mean and standard deviation score are 4.98 (4.04) respectively. The respondents agree that there is a relationship between workplace stress and physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities. The study therefore rejects the null hypotheses, and stand to accept that workplace stress has a significant relationship with physical health and well-being of academic staff of public universities.

Ho 3. There is no significant relationship between coping strategies for workplace stress and sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities.

Table 3: Summary of responses on coping strategies for workplace stress and sustainable job performance of academic staff of public universities.

Coping strategies & Sustainable performance	Frequency	Percent
Planning	38	43.7
Emotional support	24	27.6
Substance using	15	17.2
Behavioural disengagement	10	11.5
Total	87	100

Source: Nworgu (2025)

Table 3 indicates that 38 (43.7%) respondents agree that planning, 24 (27.6%) emotional support, 15 (17.2%) substance using, and 10 (11.5%) behavioural disengagement as coping strategies for workplace stress are related to sustainable job performance in public universities. The study rejects the null hypotheses that there is no significant relationship between coping strategies for workplace stress and sustainable job performance of academic staff in public universities. Therefore, the study stands to accept that there is a relationship between the stated hypotheses.

Conclusion

The workplace stress outcomes are common incidences due to high workloads and multi-tasks roles of academic staff in public universities. It has been shown that academic staff experience workplace stress outcomes like depression, anxiety, and other mental and physical health issues in public universities. In addition, the physical health, mental health and the overall well-being of academic staff in public universities are of higher priority in other to have quality functioning. However, adopting coping strategies for workplace stress has been shown to have the enabling capacity for sustainable job performance among public universities academics. The coping strategies for workplace stress are of importance because it guarantees effective, efficient, and sustainable job performance among academics in public universities.

Recommendations

Based on the findings, the following recommendations are provided:

1. Management in public universities should provide good welfare and health services for the care of the mental health stability and well-being as well as the quality functioning of academic staff of public universities.
2. Government should assist public universities with ultra-modern health facilities that can freely handle all physical health problems and well-being of academic staff in public universities.
3. Academic employees should avoid negative workplace coping strategies, and adopt the positive coping strategies that effectively and efficiently support sustainable job performance in public universities.

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