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Secretaries' Perceived Strategies for Coping with Occupational Stress in Banks in Anambra State

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Abstract

The study investigated bank secretaries' perceived strategies for coping with stress. Survey design was adopted. Population of study comprised of 113 bank secretaries in all the branches of registered commercial banks in Anambra State. Three research questions and three hypotheses guided the study. A-point rating scale questions with 30-items covering the causes of stress, effects of these stressors on performance and strategies for coping with stress. Reliability co-efficient of 0.73 was obtained for the instrument using Cronbach alpha. Mean and standard deviation were used to analyze data in order to answer the research questions and determine the homogeneous or otherwise of the respondents mean, while t-test was used to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. Results revealed that bank secretaries perceived work functions as cause of stress; these stressors had great effect on their performance, and the coping strategies as effective. Also respondents did not differ significantly in their mean response based on gender, work experience and marital status. Consequently, it was recommended among others, that bank secretaries should be engaged in stress management programmes as stress is inescapable in order to get work done.

Introduction

Pressure is part and parcel of all work which helps to keep one motivated and urges the individual to strive for excellence, but increased pressure can lead to stress

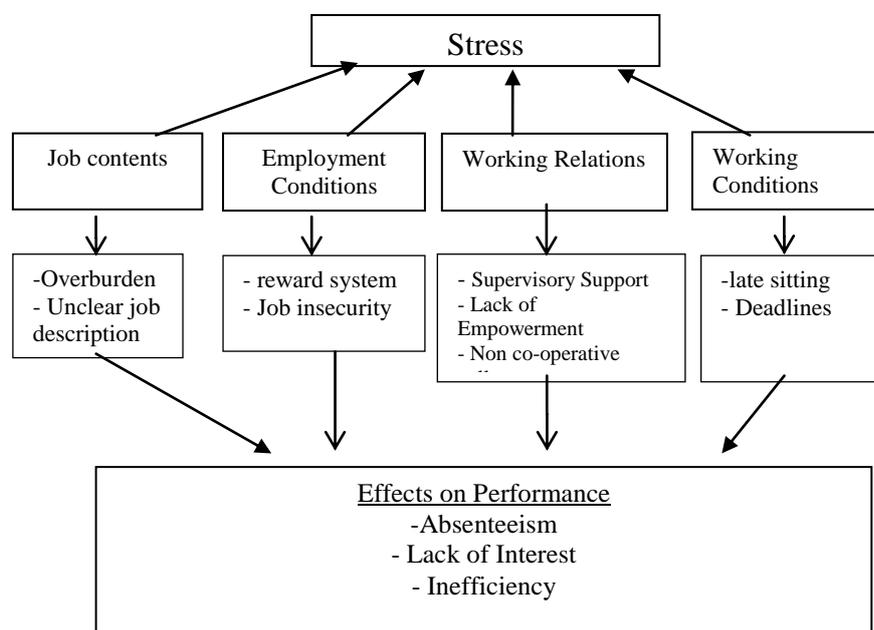
which undermines performance. Job life is an important aspect of our daily lives that exerts a great deal of stress. In today's workplace, stress is a major issue and a matter of concern for the employees and the organization; it is a common mental state that is rapidly growing among employees in any field. Sohail, Waqar, Kazim and Rizvi (2012) posited that stress affects employees' mental abilities and physical behaviour resulting in increased or decreased performance efficiency. Stress increase efficiency when it has positive impact of motivating individuals to achieve their goals, this is referred to as Eustress, and decrease efficiency when it exceeds the limit of tolerance among employees and prevents an individual from attainment of goals known as distress. Occupational stress is mostly taken from the negative perspective and this distress results to employee unproductivity and inefficiency.

Occupational Stress and Organisational Factors Causing Stress

Different authors have described and explained occupational stress in diverse ways. Malta (2004) defined occupational stress as any discomfort which is felt and perceived at a personal level triggered by instances, events or situations that are intense and frequent in nature so as to exceed as persons' coping capabilities and resources to handle them adequately. Patric (2011) described occupational stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirement of the job do not match capabilities, resources or need of the worker. Kavitha (2009) viewed occupational stress from the viewpoint of work environment and individual inter-relation and stated that occupational stress is the interaction of the work conditions with the characteristics of the worker such that the demands of the work exceed the ability of the worker to cope with them. Hassan (2009) asserted that occupational stress is the inability to cope with the pressures in a job, because of poor fit between someone's abilities and his/her research requirements and conditions which affect an individual's productivity, effectiveness, personal health and quality of work. These definitions reveal stress as adverse to the individual and thus restraints the worker from achieving set objectives effectively in the work place.

The work environment is source of both demands and pressures causing stress, structural and social resources to counteract stress. Work place factors associated with stress and health risks are categorized as those to do with the content of work and those to do with the social and organizational context of work. Work place factors connected with stress are categorized as those to do with the content of work and those to do with the social and organizational context of work (Malik, 2011). Work place stress intrinsic to the job include long hours, poor work conditions, time pressure, work overload, difficult and complex tasks. Michie (2002) stated other causes of occupational stress to include under work or conflicting roles and boundaries, under promotion, lack of promotion, lack of training and job insecurity, organizational culture etc.

Organizational factors that are burden to bank employees and inadvertently develops to stress according to Sohail et al (2012) includes meeting deadlines, tackling confused bosses, overtime, working hours, workload, inadequate monetary rewards, communication barriers, pressures of avoiding errors at job or to complete tasks in a given limited time. Kavitha (2009) stated further that job description, lack of opportunities and chance of small errors resulting in serious consequences give rise to occupational stress. These stressors affect employee performance and decrease their efficiency as seen in the diagram below.



Source: Stressors and effects on performance – Sohail, Waqar, kazim and Rizvi (2012)

The diagram above shows occupational stress associated with job content, employment conditions, working relations and conditions. These four categories are the basis, stressors that stem from them are: overburden, unclear job description, reward system, job in security, supervisor and colleague support, empowerment, tradeoff between work and social life, public dealings, late sitting and deadlines.

Statement of the Problem

Occupational stress is a salient hurdle towards continuous improvement process in any organization. In recent times, business organisations especially the banking sector

had undergone drastic and striking adjustments due to globalization and liberalization, increased competition due to entrance of private (corporate) sector banks, downsizing, introduction of new technologies etc., these transformations have affected the social, economic and psychological domains of employees and their relatives Jayashree (2002). Malik (2011) asserted that jobs and work environment commonly produce stress if not properly handled can result in negative and dysfunctional behaviour at work, the main thrust of this study therefore, is to ascertain the effects of occupational stress on bank employees especially bank secretaries whose functions according to Davies (2009) includes; performing administrative duties, compose correspondence, plan and schedule meetings, plan and schedule meetings, manage the calendar of bank's senior management, organize and maintain files, make travel arrangement for bank employees, maintaining office equipment and purchase supplies, completing data retrieval, secure client financial information and maintain banks' policy and procedure guide books.

Research Questions

The study was guided by the following research question;

1. What do bank secretaries' perceive as causes of stress in the work place?
2. To what extent does occupational stress affect the job performance of bank secretaries?
3. What do bank secretaries' perceive as strategies for coping with stress?

Hypotheses

The following hypotheses were formulated, and tested at 0.05 level of significance.

1. There is no significant difference in the mean response of male and female bank secretaries on causes of stress.
2. Highly experienced and less experienced bank secretaries do not differ significantly in their mean rating of effects of occupational stress on their performance.
3. There is no significant difference in the mean rating of married and single bank secretaries on strategies for coping with stress.

Method

The design adopted for the study was survey design as recommended by Nwogu (1991) is appropriate for seeking individuals' opinion, attitudes and setting in a natural setting. The population of the study comprised of 113 bank secretaries in all the branches of registered commercial banks in Anambra State. The entire population was studied because of the small size. The instrument for data collection is a structured 30-item questionnaire in three sections (section A and sections B1, B2 and B3). Section A sought demographic profile of the respondent while section B1

covered the first research question, B2 covered the second research question and B3 covered the third research question. Four response options of SA (Strongly Agree) = 4 points, A (Agree) = 3 points, D (Disagree) = 2 points and SD (SD) = 1 point. The instrument was validated by 1 stress consultants in Anambra State University Teaching Hospital (ASUTH), Awka and 1 expert in measurement and evaluation in Nnamdi Azikiwe University, Awka. The reliability of the instrument was tested using Cronbach Alpha and a co-efficient of 0.73 was obtained.

One hundred and thirteen copies of the questionnaire were administered to the respondent by the researcher and four research assistants. Out of the 113 copies of questionnaire administered, 90 (79.6%) copies were returned and Taylor-Powell & Hermann (2000) posited that 60 percent return rate and above can be regarded as adequate and generalization can be drawn based on such percentage. Ninety copies of questionnaire returned were therefore used for data analysis.

Arithmetic mean and standard deviation were used to answer the research question and determine homogeneous or heterogeneous the respondents were in their opinions. The t-test statistic was adopted to test the hypotheses at 0.05 level of significance. To answer the research questions, a decision rule of was established thus; mean ratings of 3.50-4.00 were regarded as a very great cause of stress, with very great effect on job performance and coping strategy highly effective; 2.50-3.49 were regarded as great cause of stress, with great effect on job performance and coping strategy effective; 1.50-2.49 were regarded as low cause of stress, with low effect on job performance and coping strategy ineffective; while mean rating below 1.50 was regarded as a very low cause of stress, with very low effect on job performance and coping strategy highly ineffective. In testing the hypotheses, where the calculated t-value is equal or greater than the p-value, it means that significance difference exists in the opinion of the respondents and the hypothesis will be rejected. On the other hand, where the calculated t-value is less than the p-value, it means that significant difference does not exist in the respondents' opinion and the hypothesis will be upheld.

Results

The results of data collected are shown in table 1-6.

Table 1: Respondents' rating of the causes of stress

N=90

S/N	Causes of Stress	Mean	SD	Remarks
1	Unclear job tasks	3.16	0.95	Great
2	Handling many files and documents (hard and soft copy)	2.84	0.69	Great
3	Late sittings causes fatigue	3.11	0.77	Great
4	Pressure of meeting unrealistic deadlines	2.86	0.86	Great
5	Inappropriate reward system in my organization	2.92	0.80	Great
6	Insecure work environment	3.96	0.76	Very Great
7	Repetitive tasks	3.62	0.78	Very Great
8	Non cooperative colleagues	2.71	0.90	Great
9	Lack of participation in decision making	2.91	0.84	Great
10	Extensive working hours	3.07	0.75	Great
Grand Mean and Standard Deviation		2.97	0.81	Great

Data in Table 1 show that the respondents perceive 2 out of the 10 listed causes of stress as very great cause of stress to their occupation, and the remaining 8 as great cause of stress. The grand mean of 2.97 indicates that, generally, the respondents perceive the listed items as great cause of stress in the work place. The standard deviation which ranges from 0.69 to 0.95 shows that the opinion of the respondents' are homogeneous in their rating of causes of stress in the workplace.

Table 2: Respondents' Rating of Effects of stress on Performance

N= 90

S/N	Effects of Stress on Performance	Mean	SD	Remarks
11	I am Inefficient to perform when job tasks are not clear	3.18	0.77	Great
12	Late sitting decreases my efficiency	3.77	0.81	Very Great
13	Inadequate training is the reason for my inefficiency	2.62	1.12	Great
14	I am in the wrong job and this affects my performance	2.69	0.77	Great
15	Absenteeism increases due to job insecurity	2.76	0.78	Great
16	Poor reward system leads to my lack of interest in this job	2.89	0.69	Great
17	My task accomplishment decreases I have unsupportive supervisors	2.84	0.79	Great
18	Non co-operative co-workers affects the quality of my work	2.17	0.91	Low
19	I have little or no control over the way this job is done and this increases my inefficiency	2.58	0.92	Great
20	My private, social and family life is constantly interfered with and this affects my job performance	2.49	0.85	Low
Grand Mean		2.75		Great

Data in Table 2 show that 7 out of the 10 items were rated as having great effect on job performance, with 1 item rated very great extent and the remaining 2 items rated low extent effect on job performance. The grand mean of 2.75 indicates that, generally, the respondents' perceive stress as having great effect on job performance. The standard deviation which range from 0.69 to 1.12 shows that the respondents' opinion are slightly homogeneous in their rating of effects of stress on job performance.

Table 3: Respondents' Rating of strategies for coping with stress

N=90

S/N	Coping Strategies	Mean	SD	Remarks
21	Going for counseling helps me cope with occupational stress	3.33	0.76	Effective
22	Resting and relaxing with friends after work helps me cope with occupational stress	3.22	0.63	Effective
23	Participating in stress management training programme helps me cope with occupational stress	3.20	0.67	Effective
24	Taking balanced diet helps me cope with occupational stress	3.52	0.60	Very Effective
25	Managing my time helps me cope with occupational stress	3.39	0.67	Effective
26	Taking some quantity of alcohol helps me cope with occupational stress	2.30	0.94	Ineffective
27	Constant medical check-up enables me cope with occupational stress	3.20	0.60	Effective
28	Setting realistic deadlines for my job helps me cope with occupational stress	3.32	0.70	Effective
29	Maintaining good ambiance at work helps me cope with occupational stress	3.48	0.57	Effective
30	Physical exercise helps me cope with occupational stress	3.54	0.64	Very Effective
Grand Mean		3.25		Effective

Data in Table 3 show that 2 out of the 10 listed stress coping strategies were rated very effective, 7 items were rated effective while 1 item was rated ineffective coping strategy. The grand mean of 3.25 indicates that, generally, the respondents' perceive the listed coping strategies as effective. The standard deviation which range from 0.57 to 0.94 shows that the respondents' opinion are slightly homogeneous in their rating of stress coping strategies.

Table 4: t-test result of mean ratings of respondents on the causes of stress based on their age (Old and Young)

Variables	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean
Male	10	2.94	0.16	0.05
Female	10	2.99	0.18	0.06
Difference	10	-0.047	0.188	0.059

95% CI for mean difference: (-0.1814, 0.0879)

T-Test of mean difference = 0 (vs not = 0): T-Value = -0.79

P-Value = 0.45

Data in Table 4 show that the p-value of 0.45 is greater than alpha level of 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents' based on gender. The hypothesis is therefore upheld.

Table 5: t-test of mean rating of respondents on the effects of stress on their performance based on Years of Experience

Variables	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean
Highly Experienced	10	2.75	0.21	0.07
Less Experienced	10	2.75	0.19	0.06
Difference	10	-0.003	0.141	0.045

95% CI for mean difference: (-0.1038, 0.0984)

T-Test of mean difference = 0 (vs not = 0): T-Value = -0.06

P-Value = 0.95

Data in table 5 show that the p-value of 0.95 is greater than alpha level of 0.05, which means that there is no significant difference in the mean ratings of the respondents' based on years of experience. The hypothesis is therefore upheld.

Table 6: t-test of mean rating of respondents on coping strategies based on marital status

Variables	N	Mean	SD	SE Mean
Single	10	3.27	0.39	0.13
Married	10	3.24	0.33	0.11
Difference	10	0.03	0.12	0.04

95% CI for mean difference: (-0.0587, 0.1143)

T-Test of mean difference = 0 (vs not = 0): T-Value = 0.73

P-Value = 0.49

Data in table 6 show that p-value of 0.48 is greater than alpha level of 0.05, which means that significant difference does not exist in the mean rating of the respondents on coping strategies based on marital status. The hypothesis is therefore upheld.

Discussion of Findings

In respect to research question 1, the study revealed that out of the ten items listed, the respondents perceive 8 items as a great cause of stress and 2 items as very great cause of stress, which are insecure work environment and repetitive tasks. The

findings of this research question is in consonance with Sohail et al (2002) who reported that insecure workplace and repetitive job functions are amongst the greatest source of stress experienced by bank employees.

With regards to the second research question, the finding of the study reveals that the respondents perceive seven items out of ten items on effects of stress on performance that were listed as having great effect on their performance, 1 item as having great effect and the remaining two items, which is non-cooperative co-workers and effect of stress on social and private life as having low effect on their performance. The finding of this research question is in disagreement with Bickford (2005) who attributed workplace stress to non-co-operative co-workers and supervisors among others. Malik (2011) disagreed with the finding on effect of stress on social and private life and noted that most employees are unable to balance both personal and professional fronts successfully, as pressures and demands of work environment leads to neglect of personal front.

Considering research question 3, out of the 10 items listed for coping with stress, the respondents perceived 7 items as effective, 2 items as very effective while 1 item was perceived as ineffective by some respondents. The finding of the third research question affirms Azagba and Sharaf (2011) that alcohol could be used by some individuals as anti-anxiety or anti-depressant agent to relieve the impact of job stress.

The first hypothesis sought to establish if there exists significant difference in the mean rating of male and female respondents on causes of stress. The hypothesis which states that there is no significant difference in the mean of the respondents was upheld. The finding of the hypothesis is in agreement with the findings of Hassan (2009) who reported that gender has no effect on occupational stress of bank workers.

Considering the second hypothesis, the finding of the study found that there exist no significant difference in the response of highly experienced and less experienced bank secretaries on effects of stress on their performance. The null hypothesis was upheld. The finding of the study is in consonance with the findings of Patric (2011) who noted that workers in an organization have to go through certain stress to get work done irrespective of workers experience or ways of handling job done. Fernando (2007) however recommended that bank employees should be provided with monetary benefits based on work experience as to reduce the effects of stress on their performance.

With regards to the third hypothesis which sought to ascertain if there exist significant difference in the mean rating of single and married respondents stress coping strategies. The null hypothesis was upheld. The finding of the study is in line

with Bickford (2005) who advised that individuals regardless of marital status should diverse effective ways of coping with stress at work.

Conclusion

The study looked into the bank secretaries' perceived causes of stress, its effect on their performance and effective strategies for coping with stress. The findings of the study showed that bank secretaries consider most of the work functions as causes of stress in the workplace, and these stressors has great effect on their performance, and have considered a number of factors as effective strategies for coping with occupational stress. From the study, it is concluded that bank secretaries experience a lot of work stress as they carry out their administrative and clerical functions in the bank. The study further revealed that gender; work experience and marital status do not significantly affect respondents' mean rating on causes of stress, effect of the stressors to performance and effective coping strategies. Since stress is unavoidable in work life, it is obvious that bank secretaries must go through a form of stress to accomplish office tasks, efforts towards effective management of stress is paramount.

Recommendations

Based on the findings and conclusion, the study recommends that;

1. Bank secretaries should be regularly trained on modern techniques of carry out administrative and clerical tasks as to ensure hitch free handling and retrieval of valuable organizational documents and files.
2. Management should modify policies to provide secretaries with more authority over their jobs.
3. Bank secretaries should be provided with adequate incentive/work benefits as to increase their productive, reduce absenteeism and staff turnover.
4. The use of alcohol as a stress reliever should be reconsidered by secretaries as there exist difference in body responses, and negative response to the use of alcohol, may adversely affect an individual's occupation and health.
5. Bank management should engage their secretaries in stress management programmes as stress is inevitable in the day to day work activities of a secretary.

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