Effect of Gender and Age on Attitude to Stress Management – A Case Study of Academic Staff in Unical and CRUTECH, Calabar

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ABSTRACT

Promoting an effective and sustained stress management strategies is anchored on attitudes of individuals to willingly embrace them and incorporate such strategies in their daily routine. This study examines the influence of age and gender on attitude to stress management. A descriptive survey design was adopted and stratified random sampling was used to select samples from all the faculties in the two Universities. The research question inquired to know to what extent different age brackets and gender differ in their attitudes to stress management. Two hypotheses were raised and tested to ascertain the significant difference between the genders in attitude to stress management. The role of age on attitude to stress management was also examined. Empirical literatures were reviewed to gain some insights into previous findings made and available gaps to be explored. Using a descriptive research design with survey as the research method, a structured questionnaire was administered to 475 lecturers who were selected through a stratified random sampling method. Data were collected on lecturers' demographic details and attitude to stress management. Findings from this study show that male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management. It was also observed that older lecturers have more positive attitude to stress management than the younger ones. This study recommends establishment of structures and programs to encourage all lecturers to be more proactive in their attitudes to stress management. Other recommendations include a look at influencing factors like age and gender in assessing attitude to stress management.

Keywords: Age, Gender, Stress Management

BACKGROUND TO THE STUDY

Stress response affects the physical, mental and emotional health of every individual. It may result in negative symptoms like reduced concentration and or diminished efficiency at work. Effect of stress can be dangerous especially if left unmanaged or uncontrolled for a long time. This prolonged stress can generate different health consequences some of which include depression, amnesia, mental disorder, breakdown of immune defense system, cancer and insomnia (Marks, 2021; APA, 2018; Mayo Clinic 2023). Distress, which is the negative stress has been observed to be one of the leading causes of sudden deaths among workers. (American Institute of Stress, 2012). Stress response is body's way of reacting to stressful experiences. It becomes good stress (eustress) if utilized promptly and managed effectively. Distress (bad stress) sets in if the stress response is left to overwhelm the individual regularly for a long time (prolonged stress). As a result, the immune system of the person is weighed down given access to many common health problems like migraine, fever, indigestion, nausea, dizziness, palpitation, depression, anxiety and panic attacks (Mayo Clinic 2023). Many stress symptoms are sometimes misinterpreted to be symptoms and signs of common infections like malaria or typhoid fever and thereby bombarded with drugs leading to drug overuse or abuse.

Stress management programmes are learned strategies practiced over time to manage work stress. They are

designed to address the problem of work stress and can only yield significant result if it is backed by positive attitude and commitment. This is because they have to be used promptly and regularly. The influence of stress response on work efficiency cannot be overlooked because it impacts directly on the health of every individual. Workers of different age brackets and gender who are involved in any kind of work have, at some point, felt the pressure of work-related stress because there is no job without stressful elements. Even in cases where one has unique talent or passion for the job there will still arise times when there are unavoidable pressures to meet a deadline, fulfill some challenging obligations or to take difficult technical decisions. Different age groups and gender react differently to stress response depending on their attitude and commitment. This affects their level of success at managing stress response. Stress is therefore not what happens to you but how you react to what happens to you which invariably are reflected in your attitude (APA, 2018; AIS, 2012; Palmer, 2014).

Statement of the problem

Commitment to increasing life goals in a challenging world of work have impacted the physical and emotional health of workers negatively in the contemporary global world. Lecturers in UNICAL and CRUTECH are faced with challenging work environment, steadily increasing work demands, unfavorable political system and archaic institutional structures. This scenario seems to be undaunted as it transforms into an embedded institutional gene. Lecturers who have not been able to brace these challenges have been plagued with different health problems while some have dropped dead suddenly. In recent times many lecturers including Professors in UNICAL and CRUTECH have died due to different health problems or sudden death (Daily Post, 2022; Sahara Reporters, 2022; Cross river watch, 2020; Unicross, 2020; Olugbile, S., 2012). Many of these negative health scenarios maybe stress related but there is little or no commitment to stress management strategies among lecturers in these Universities (Nwachukwu, 2015; Palmer, 2014; Ofoegbu, & Nwadiani, 2006). This scenario is fast becoming a modern day economic and occupational dilemma and it is an indicator of an inadequate stress management culture among lecturers (WebMD, 2021; Adebiyi, 2013; Ejue, 2013).

It is against this backdrop that this study examined lecturers' attitude to stress management as influenced by their gender and age bracket. Unlike other topical health issues, management of work stress has not been given its pride of place within the group of ravaging health problems among workers. Stress management facilities are also lacking in the two Universities under study. Existing staff Clubs are not adequately equipped and they are barely used by just a few lecturers

Objectives of the study

The main objective of this study is to examine lecturers' attitude to stress management in Universities in Calabar Metropolis in Cross River State, Nigeria. Specific objectives of this study are as follows;

1. To examine the influence of lecturer's gender on their attitude to stress management
2. To examine the influence of lecturers' age on their attitude to stress management

Research questions

This study was guided by the following questions:

1. To what extent does lecturers' gender influence their attitude to stress management?
2. To what extent does lecturers' age influence their attitude to stress management?

Statement of hypotheses

In view of the above objectives, two research hypotheses were formulated as follows;

1. Male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management.
2. Lecturers' age does not significantly influence their attitude to stress management

Significance of the study

Findings from this study will provide an empirical resource with which management of the Universities can use as relevant tools in developing structures and policies aimed at encouraging an effective stress management culture among lecturers in the University. Observations from this study will help the lecturers to assess their attitude to stress management become more pragmatic in addressing workplace stress. It is also imperative to note here that this study is a timely academic task which will trigger more researches on stress and its negative effects on lecturers within the Universities under study.

RESEARCH DESIGN

For ease of collection of data from a large number of respondents at their convenience while maintaining a minimal financial burden on the researcher, this study adopted the descriptive survey design. Respondent's bias and distortion were curtailed through maintaining respondent's anonymity. Open ended questions were also provided to enable respondents express their views on the subject.

Population of the study

All lecturers in University of Calabar (UNICAL) and Cross River University of Technology (CRUTECH), Calabar, made up the study population. The respondents are lecturers who are actively involved in different academic and administrative activities within the University.

Sampling techniques

Adopting the existing faculties as strata, stratified random sampling method was used to draw samples from the two Universities. Convenience sampling was then used to select from the lecturers seen in the office within the days of the field research. No lecturer was selected twice.

Sample

A total of 1,464 lecturers was selected from UNICAL while 389 lecturers was selected in CRUTECH. This gave a sampling frame of 1,853 lecturers. Using Krejcie & Morgan (1970) formula 375 lecturers was obtained for UNICAL and 100 lecturers for CRUTECH. This gives a total of 475 sample drawn from the two Universities.

Sources of data collection

Primary and Secondary data were used. Responses through questionnaire and observation provide the primary data while text books, articles, Journal and Newspaper reports provide the secondary data. Data obtained were cleaned up by checking for unclear, ambiguous or no responses. They were thereafter coded using the coding sheet, before analysis and interpretation.

TABLE 1. Sample distribution for UNICAL

S/N	Faculties	Total Population in Faculties	Sample Drawn		
			M	F	Total
1	Agric and Forestry	111	17	11	28
2	Allied Medical Sciences	114	7	22	29

3	Arts	193	25	24	49
4	Basic Medical Sciences	63	8	8	16
5	Medicine and Dentistry	181	31	15	46
6	Education	242	35	27	62
7	Law	33	7	2	9
8	Management Sciences	81	15	6	21
9	Sciences	251	50	14	64
10	Social Sciences	130	28	5	33
11	Institutes	53	9	5	14
12	Library	12	2	2	4
	Grand Total	**1,464**	**234**	**141**	**375**

Source: Field survey (2023)

TABLE 2. Sample distribution for CRUTECH

S/N	Faculties	Total Population in Faculties	Sample Drawn		
			M	F	Total
1	Agric & Forestry	39	8	2	10
2	Basic Med. Sciences	22	6	1	7
3	Communication Technology & CGS	35	7	2	9
4	Education	52	10	3	13
5	Engineering	56	13	1	14
6	Environmental Sciences	55	10	4	14
7	Management Sciences	37	7	2	9
8	Sciences	84	12	10	22
9	Library	9	1	1	2
	Grand total	**389**	**74**	**26**	**100**

Source: Field survey (2023)

DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

General description of data

This study examined the influence of University Lecturers' age and gender on their attitude to stress management. The study was conducted in the two public Universities in Calabar, Cross River State of Nigeria. The three major variables examined are age bracket, gender and attitude to stress management. Age bracket and gender are considered as independent variables while attitude to stress management is the dependent variable. The two independent variables were measured on a nominal scale as evidenced in table 3.

Lecturers attitude to stress, used as a dependent variable to compare with sex and age as independent variables, was also measured on a four-point Likert type scale of "very often", "often", "not often", and "not very often". Data gathered from the field were subjected to analysis using version 18 of the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS). Results of the analysis are reported in this section. The descriptive

statistics are presented in Tables 4 and 5.

TABLE 3. Descriptive summaries for lecturers' demographic information

S/No	Variable	Category	N	%
1	Sex	Male	308	64.8
		Female	167	35.2
2	Age	Below 30 years	113	23.8
		30-45 years	187	39.4
		46-60 years	129	27.2
		Above 60 years	46	9.7
3	Work Experience	Below 10 years	229	48.2
		10-20 years	187	39.4
		Above 20 years	59	12.4
4	Rank	Assistant Lecturer	87	18.3
		Lecturer 11	107	22.3
		Lecturer 1	110	23.2
		Senior Lecturer	56	11.8
		Reader	44	9.3
		Professor	71	14.9
5	Position Held	Dean/Director	22	4.6
		Head of Department	63	13.3
		Coordinator	36	7.6
		Graduate Chairman	23	4.8
		Exams Officer	53	11.2
		Undergraduate project coordinator	278	58.5

Source: Field survey (2023)

Information on table 3 above gives an interesting breakdown of demographic statistics of the lecturers. More males were captured but quite a significant number of female lecturers were also examined. The figures would have affected the gender result if the total number of female captured were less than half of the total number of males. Lecturers within the different age brackets were almost equally shared between the three age brackets; below 30 yrs, 30 – 45yrs and 46 – 60 yrs. Lecturers within the age bracket of above 60 yrs. who were interviewed made up the lowest percentage (9.7) of the sample population. This means that majority of the lecturers examined are within the vibrant age bracket of below 60 years. It is therefore imperative that the active years of a worker's life need to be adequately equipped with relevant stress management skills for improved efficiency at work.

Table 3 further shows that 48.2 percent of the total number of lecturers examined has less than 10 years work experience. This is followed by 39.4 percent of the total number of lecturers examined with work experience of between 10 -20 years. Surprisingly only 12.4 percent have work experience of more than 20 years. This shows that within the sample population there are many lecturers who have a lot of years to put into the teaching job. However, all age brackets need stress management programmes in order to enhance their health and promote their efficiency at work.

The demographic statistics on table 3 also shows that majority of the lecturers examined are between the rank of lecturer 1 and assistant lecturer. This is followed by the rank of Professor with 14.9 of the total number of lecturers captured. Senior lecturers were 11.8 percent followed by Readers with 9.3 percent. Except for the rank of Reader, the number of lecturers examined was almost equally shared between assistant lecturers and Professors. This is quite significant because it shows that the sample population was drawn from almost all available ranks and was also almost equally represented by the different ranks. Out of the total number of lecturers examined, more than half hold the position of undergraduate coordinator. This is followed by Head of department with 13.3 percent and exam officers with 11.2 percent. Apart from the rank of coordinator with 7.6, the remaining sample population is shared almost equally between Dean/Director and Graduate Chairman. This therefore means that about half of the opinion expressed in this study is captured from lecturers holding the position of undergraduate project coordinator.

Presentation of results

Hypothesis one

Ho: Male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management.

H_1: Male and female lecturers differ significantly in their attitude to stress management.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is sex with its natural classification of male and female, while the dependent variable is attitude to stress management. The test statistic used in testing this hypothesis was independent t-test. See the result in Table 4. Result of the analysis in Table 4 shows that the calculated t-value of 1.327 is less than the critical t-value of 1.96 at 0.05 level of significance using 473 degrees of freedom. This means that male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management. Based on this result, the null hypothesis was accepted.

Hypothesis two

Ho: Lecturers' age does not significantly influence their attitude to stress management.

H1: Lecturers' age significantly influences their attitude to stress management.

The independent variable in this hypothesis is lecturers' age categorized into different age brackets of "below 30 years", "30-45 years", "46-60 years", and "above 60 years", while the dependent variable is attitude to stress management. Based on this categorization, One-Way Analysis of Variance test statistic was adopted in testing the hypothesis. Results of the analysis are presented here. Result of analysis on Table 5 shows that the calculated F-ratio of 4.999 is greater than the critical F-ratio of 2.60 at .05 level of significance using 3 and 470 degrees of freedom. This means that, lecturers' age significantly influences their attitude to stress management. Based on this result the null hypothesis is rejected. Since the result indicates significant influence, a post hoc comparison test was carried out to determine which pair wise group difference is responsible for the significant difference. The method of post hoc adopted was Fisher's Least Significance Difference (LSD). The results are presented here. Results of post hoc analysis show that the calculated t-values for the pair wise comparisons for ages below 30 years versus above 60 years (3.45), 30-45 years versus above 60 years (3.70), and 46-60 years versus above 60 years (2.75) were each greater than the critical t-value of 1.96 at .05 level of significance. This means that, for those pairs there was significant influence of age on their attitude to stress management. Results of the group mean values show that it was lecturers above 60 years of age (X = 44.13) that put up positive attitude to stress management. Generally, results of mean values indicate that the older a lecturer the more likely he/she puts up a better attitude to stress management.

Discussion Of Findings

TABLE 4. Summary of independent t-test for male and female lecturers in lecturers' attitude to stress management

Sex	N	X	SD	T	Sig
Male	475	40.72	6.04	1.327	0.185
Female	475	41.51	6.47		

*P>.05; df = 473; critical t = 1.96

Source: Field survey (2023)

TABLE 5. Summary of One-Way ANOVA for the influence of lecturers' age on their attitude to stress management

Age Bracket	N	X	SD		
30-45 years	187	40.4	5.28		
46-60 years	129	41.24	6.76		
Above 60 years	46	44.13	7.01		
Total	**475**	**40.98**	**6.2**		
Source of Variation	**SS**	**Df**	**MS**	**F**	**Sig**
Between Groups	561.919	3	187.306		
Within Groups	17611.08	470	37.47	4.999*	0.002
Total	**18173**	**473**			

*P<.05; critical F-ratio = 2.60

Source: Field survey (2023)

TABLE 6. Summary of Fisher's LSD for the influence of Lecturers' age on

attitude stress management

Age Bracket	1	2	3	4
	(n=113)	**(n = 187)**	**(n = 129)**	**(n = 46)**
Below 30 years (1)	40.43[a]	0.04[b]	0.81	3.7
30-45 years (2)	O.05[C]	40.4	0.84	3.73
46-60 years (3)	1.03	1.71	41.24	2.89
Above 60 years (4)	3.45*	3.70*	2.75*	44.13
(MSW = 37.470)				

*P<.05

1. Group mean are along principal diagonals
2. Differences among group mean are above the principal diagonal
3. T-values are below the principal diagonal

Source: Field survey (2023)

Ho: Male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management. The finding

of this hypothesis suggests one or both of the following; that women are somewhat reluctant to address their stresses or that men have more pragmatic attitude to stress management. This finding notes an interesting deviation from the findings of Taylor et al (2000) and James (2010) who note that males and females differ significantly in their attitude to stress management. This, they explain, is because of the oxytocin in women which helps them to scale back the production of cortisol and adrenaline thereby minimizing their harmful effect in the body. In the same vein, Nwakwesi (2000) and Ikpeme (2001) also note that women have more positive attitude to stress management activities. The argument made in the above literature is that women are by nature better able to manage stress and are more receptive to stress management programmes. Women are also by natural endowment more inclined (though unconsciously) to using 'tending and befriending' as their stress management strategies (White, 2021; Eller, 2015; Taylor et al, 2000; James 2010; APA, 2012). The tending and befriending hypothesis is simply the attitude to tend to kids, loved ones and pets or make new friends to relieve stressful response (White, 2021). This is believed to work well for women as a strategy to overcome stress.

The finding of this study shows that male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitudes to stress management. This finding explains a publication by APA (2012:12) where it was noted that; "Women are more likely than men to say their already high stress levels are on the rise and they are less likely to believe they are doing a good job of managing their stress." This observation is obvious in the finding of this hypothesis because male and female lecturers seem to be at par in their attitude to stress management.

This therefore presents an important entry point for further research in order to examine where and how male and female lecturers are similar in their attitude to stress management. Such a research will provide useful information in understanding the similarities or differences in male and female lecturers' attitude to stress management. Based on the finding of this study, it is therefore important to provide regular stress management information to both male and female lecturers. No gender should be seen as doing better than the other in managing work stress.

H1: Lecturers' age significantly influences their attitude to stress management. Aging is noted to come with easy vulnerability of body organs to stress and pressure (Nwakwesi, 2000; AIS, 2013; APA 2016) which makes the symptoms of stress more disheartening and dangerous within a short space of time. The obvious uncomfortable symptoms of stress make individuals within such age brackets to search for relief strategies or therapies in order to stay healthy. This fact therefore explains why age has been found to impact significant influence on lecturers' attitude to stress management. The finding from this study is in support of (AIS, 2020; APA, (2016; APA, 2018; Johnson, Holdsworth, Hoel, & Zapf, 2013) in their opinion that older people tend to have more positive attitude to stress management because they have less work load and are now more concerned with living healthier lives and enjoying the fruits of their labour.

In order to get more insights into this finding, the post ad-hoc analysis was conducted as evidenced in table 6. It shows that the lecturers within the age bracket of above 60 years show more positive attitudes to stress management. Interestingly, this is in support of the findings of APA (2016) and AIS (2013) where it was noted that the 'matures' who are above 60 are better able to bring their stress levels to a healthier point. The APA (2016) findings further notes that the younger ones are not doing a great job managing their stress especially in the face of crowded and pressing demands of life driven by haste to make millions before old age. This observation also applies to younger lecturers in UNICAL and CRUTECH who seem to be doing little or nothing to manage their work stress.

It was observed during this study that the lecturers within the lower age brackets are more in a hurry to accomplish tasks and earn more money. Many of them complained of having a lot of work to do and so did not have time to entertain our questionnaire. These lecturers are going through a lot of stress. They are aware of it, but because they are not very aware of the long term effect of prolonged stress, they tend to give little or no attention to managing it. It should also be noted here that during the administration of the

questionnaire for this study, the 'mature' lecturers (those above 60 years' age bracket) were more receptive and willing to fill the questionnaire. They asked questions about different types of stress management strategies and lamented the increasing choking demands of work within the University system. This observation further strengthens the findings that older people have more positive attitude to stress management. It is however imperative that all age brackets are given adequate information about stress management strategies. This will equip them efficiently for improved and pragmatic attitude to stress management.

SUMMARY, CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Summary of the study

This study which was aimed at gaining some insights into the interplay between age, gender and attitude to stress management among lecturers was informed by the poor attitude of lecturers to stress management programmes and the increasing incidence of sudden deaths among lecturers and workers in other organizations. This study was carried out in UNICAL and CRUTECH which are the two public Universities in Calabar metropolis. 475 lecturers in the two Universities were interacted with. The findings from this study records some observations which brings to fore some important factors needed to promote stress management culture among lecturers.

This study gives some insights into the influence of gender on attitude to stress management. It is surprising to note here that contrary to some studies reviewed in this work, male and female lecturers do not differ significantly in their attitude to stress management. The underlying cause of this is beyond the scope of this research. It is therefore the suggestion of this study that a further study to find out the underlying factors with regards to this insignificant difference between the genders in attitude to stress management be carried out. This will help to bring to fore the factors that make men and women to have almost the same attitude to stress management.

This study also examined the influence of age on attitude to stress management. The result gave an insight into the differences between the various age brackets in attitude to stress management. It was found out that the older lecturers, especially those above 60 years have more positive attitudes to stress management while the younger ones seem to be more engrossed with efforts to meet up with career demands and family obligations.

Conclusion

Positive attitude to stress management are to an extent impacted by age and gender. Work stress is a topical health issue that affects all facets of human life in spite of age, occupational status or gender. It is fast becoming a modern day epidemic which is very often usually overlooked and given little or no attention. The findings of this study have therefore been able to draw attention to the urgent need to design stress management programmes for lecturers in Unical and Crutech. Lecturers are endowed with vast knowledge in their different fields and discipline but having a commitment to stress management strategies may be a farfetched activity for them. The reason for this is obvious in the light of increasing choking demands of their different careers and family obligations. These challenges are some of the modern day problems lecturers brace up to daily at the detriment of their individual health.

Recommendations

In view of the above findings the following recommendations are made; A comprehensive stress management programme should be designed for lecturers in the two Universities. Modern office facilities should be provided in the two Universities to enhance ease and speed in handling tasks. Younger lecturers

should be encouraged to have a stress management culture either through health promotion policies or routine in-house stress management programmes in the Universities.

Stress management units should be established in every faculty in the Universities. The availability of such units will represent important reference points and key reminders of the need for effective personal stress management strategies in the Universities. The younger lecturers will then be able to go to these units and make use of the available stress management kits or resources to relieve their stresses at any time.

This study should be duplicated in other Universities with an aim to make further findings and also compare observations from different Universities. Findings made from further studies will also provide updated data on the challenging issues of work place stress among lecturers in the Universities thereby enhancing formulation of academic modules or theories. The findings of this research should also be used for policy formulation and program intervention aimed at encouraging positive attitudes to stress management among lecturers in Universities in Calabar Metropolis.

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