

Work Burnout Experience among University Non Teaching Staff: A Gender Approach

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Abstract

The study examined gender as a factor in the experience of work-burnout among University Non-Teaching Staff. It made use of 496 respondents (272 male and 224 female). Maslach Burnout Inventory was used as an instrument to assess the level of differences in the emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment of staff of both sexes. Three hypotheses were posited and were tested them using Z-test statistics. Results indicated no difference in the levels of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishment of both male and female staff. However, the mean of the scores on the de-personalisation of both sexes shows a significant difference. It was confirmed also that male staff experienced higher level of de-personalisation than their female counterparts. Implications of these results were given while recommendations were made on how best to tackle the growing phenomenon of burnout among both sexes.

Key words: *Work-burnout, Depersonalisation, Emotional exhaustion, reduced personal accomplishment and gender*

Introduction

The term “work-burnout” has been applied to the experience of stressors at work that often lead to depressed mood, exhaustion, poor performance and attitude and personality changes which in turn leads to illness and premature retirement, (Cherniss,1989; Friedman & Farber, 1992). Both clinical and empirical researches have been undertaken to shed more light on this increasingly important social problem. A great deal of attention has been devoted to the problem of work-burnout and its social consequences for the individual. (Schaufeli, Maslach & Marek, 1993). Burke & Greenglass (1995) also defined burnout as a multidimensional construct of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment that can occur among individuals who work extensively with others under considerable time pressures.

Literature Review

Work-burnout is reported to be correlated with numerous self-reported measures of personal distress such as depression, apathy, tension, fatigue and anxiety (Burke & Greenglass, 2001). Maslach & Jackson had identified the three aspects of burnout as:

- The development of increased feelings of **emotional exhaustion** and fatigue by workers. As emotional resources are depleted, workers feel they are no longer able to give of themselves as they were able to do earlier.
- A tendency for workers to develop negative, cynical attitudes toward their clients. This feeling is described as **depersonalisation**.
- The tendency to evaluate oneself negatively, particularly with regards to one's clients. People experiencing this aspect of burnout are not happy with their jobs or themselves. This feeling has been described by as lack of feeling or **reduced personal accomplishment**.

Although Maslach & Jackson (1986) provide clear evidence for these three aspects of burnout for people in the helping professions, Schwab & Iwanicki (1982) have warned that it is crucial to note that one aspect is not an inevitable consequence of another. In another words, one does not necessarily progress from emotional exhaustion through depersonalization to a lack of a feeling of personal accomplishment.

As much as Maslach posited that the three factors included in the burnout phenomenon (emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and lack of personal accomplishment) are independent and cannot be summed to produce one central burnout score, Cherniss (1989) felt that the three patterns he has identified do not necessarily co-occur. They simply represent three separate responses to stressful, frustrating or monotonous work in a helping profession

In 1997, a survey was carried out by the Finnish Institute of Occupational Health among working-age population on the incidence of and seriousness of burnout cases. 5000 Respondents aged between 24 and 65 and working in different jobs and industries were requested to fill questionnaires. Out of the 3300 people that replied, 53% of them were women; 2300 were working at the time. The survey discovered that the totals number of burnout casers among women was slightly higher than among men on the sum of the three symptoms of burnout with special emphasis on exhaustion. Both Groups however showed high incidence of serious burnout syndrome (7%) while milder symptoms had been suffered by slightly more than half of the male and female respondents. Any difference between men and women was connected with work-related exhaustion; 21% of the women and 17% of the men said they were suffering from it. No symptoms of exhaustion were reported by 44% of men, but only 34% of women. Increasing cynicism at work was slightly more common among men than among women; in statistical terms, however the different was insignificant. The prevalence of burnout was also varied by sector of employment and occupation. According to the study, its prevalence among men and women in specific industries with highest incidence of burnout predominantly employed women (hotels and catering, banking and insurance, education and research), predominantly men (mechanical repairs) and both sexes equally (agriculture and forestry) On the other hand, the sectors showing lowest incidence of burnout predominantly employed either men or women, but also employing both sexes in equal numbers.

Cynicisms was most prevalent in male industries (machine repairs; transport and storage) and industries where both sexes were equally represented (agriculture and forestry); real estate maintenance). These findings are fairly consistent with those of earlier study of Schaufelli & Enzmann (1998). This difference of higher cynicisms for men and exhaustion for women had been interpreted to stereotypical gender roles or natural inclinations among both sexes. According to such interpretations, women are better equipped for human relations and for sharing their negative emotions, while men tend to suppress their emotional impulses in

order to live up to their roles, therefore making them more inclined to adopt cynical attitudes as a means for coping with stress. It has also been explained that exhaustion does affect women than men because more often than not, women do carry double workload (job, housework, childcare). The inequality between the two sexes in the workplace has also been ascribed as another factor in explain the differences. (Kalimo & Hakanen, 1998).

Kalimo & Hakanen (1998) discovered that both sexes differ significantly in the ways they cope with stress. According to them, women do take sick leave more often than men and were clearly more active in seeking outside help for their problems, while men thought more and more of retiring as their burnout gets worse. All in all, women have a wider range of relationships than men and they also use these networks to build up their strength. Research has also shown that family life with all its duties and responsibilities is not only a burden but a rewarding resource that strengthens one's emotional well-being, human contacts and interpersonal skills. Infact, the study carried out has shown that men who share housework and family responsibilities with their wives and support their career development are less prone to burnout than those who don't. This may therefore explain why women cope better with burnout than men in the long run.

Elevated scores on burnout measures among different professionals have been associated with higher levels of perceived role conflict and role ambiguity (Schwab & Iwanicki, 1982), lessened self-actualisation and lack of perceived support (Pierce & Molloy, 1990). Research suggests that professionals in educational settings are susceptible to job stress and burnout because of work-overloads, lack of autonomy in the work setting, ambiguity about professional roles and performance constraints. (Watkins, 1983)

The interconnection between these pressures of meeting up job challenges, family expectations and group needs usually lead to occupational stressors generally reported in work burnout. Thus, conflict may arise between a person's roles as an employee and a spouse and being the president of a social club. University is a place where many things take place almost the same time. There is ample evidence that university staff in the course of their careers, experience a great deal of stress. {University Of Waterloo Gazette, 1995; Car-Gregg 2002}. The experience of stressors at work often results in depressed mood, exhaustion, poor performance, and attitude and personality changes, which, in turn, lead to illness and premature retirement (Burke & Greenglass, 1995; Cherniss, 1989; Friedman & Farber, 1992). University system as an educational institution gives equal employment opportunity to every citizen without bias for gender, tribe or social status. This is because employment in the system is more rooted in academic and administrative potentials and capabilities. Thus, the university community comprises of different strata of human beings who are daily working together to keep the system going in their own ways. In the last one decade, Nigerian University system has run ceaselessly without the usual holiday breaks for staff to refresh unless interrupted by sporadic strikes. The resultant effect of the pressures mounted on staff is the heavy workload that is continually increasing with the associated increase in stress, which appears to be a major threat to quality of life. Many staff now feel they can no longer complete the jobs they are expected to do. It is equally noteworthy that while expectations are increasing, attempts at complementary improvements in efficiency to make the workload manageable remain very few. Non-Teaching staff carry extra loads through new part-time programmes being established despite the fact that the number of staff in relation to expected job to be done remains fairly

constant. Many staff could not take full vacations in the last one-decade leading to syndrome of accumulated leaves. Staff workloads are on the increase; many are working longer hours and have assumed responsibilities as staff complements have been reduced through attritions without replacements. Many staff today are suffering lower productivity and decreased service despite better remunerations. We seem to have today an over-burdened workforce in the system.

Statement of problem

A search through Nigerian literature showed paucity of research in the study of Nigerian Workers generally in relation to work-burnout experience. The present study seeks to determine the level of differences experienced by Non Teaching staff of different gender in their level of work-burnout. The study aims at exploring their differences in the three subsets of Maslach Burnout inventory scales (emotional exhaustion, Depersonalisation and reduced personal accomplishment).

Hypotheses

1. There will be no significant difference in the level of emotional exhaustion of Non-Teaching Staff of different gender.
2. There will be no significant difference in the level of Depersonalisation of Non-Teaching Staff of different gender.
3. There will be no significant difference in the level of reduced personal accomplishment of Non-Teaching Staff of different gender.

Design

This study adopted the descriptive research approach of ex-post facto type. This was chosen simply because the researcher had no control and did not intend to control or manipulate any of the independent variables as they had occurred.

Population

The target population for this study comprises Non-Teaching members of staff of public Universities in the South Western part of Nigeria.

Sample

The sample for the study consists of 10 Universities in six states. However, because of the large size of the population, there was the need to select a representation of the population through sampling technique. A total of 496 Non Teaching staff participated in the study; they were made up of 272 male Staff and 224 female Staff. The staff were randomly selected from the pool of Non-Teaching staff of six Universities representing each of the six states of south western Nigeria.

Instrument

Work-burnout was measured with the Maslach Burnout Inventory (form ed.). This scale is also a self-report survey that uses a Likert scale. It has a 22 items (comprising of 8 items for emotional exhaustion, 9 items for depersonalisation and 5 items for reduced personal accomplishment) where respondents are asked to respond to each statement in terms of the following; never, a few times in a year or less, once a month or less, a few times a month, once a week, a few times in a week, and everyday. Respondents are to indicate how frequently “they feel burned out from their work”, “frustrated by their jobs,” fatigued when they get up in the morning and have to face another day on the job” and “feeling like they are at the end of the rope”. Many studies had substantiated the validity and reliability of the MBI Form Ed. (Leiter, 1993, Wolpin,et.al,(1994).The Alpha reliability co-efficient for this measure is estimated at .90 for emotional exhaustion, .76 for De-personalisation and .76 for personal accomplishment in the cronbach alpha scale. Ubangha (1997) validated this scale and successfully used it in a study among secondary school teachers in Cross River State of Nigeria

Data collection

The six universities were visited by the researcher to distribute questionnaires to respondents. This was done through the staff union congresses. Several visits were made to the institutions to retrieve the completed questionnaires. In all, a total of 619 questionnaires were returned out of the 700 distributed which represent 88.4 percent. However, 123 completed questionnaires excluded because the respondents did not respond to all items. Analyses were then conducted on a total of 496 complete questionnaire sets.

Data Analysis

The data collected from the administered questionnaires were subjected to z-test statistics for data analysis

Result: The result of the data analysis for all the three hypotheses are as shown in table 1 below:

Table 1: Z Test of two sample for means for level of Emotional Exhaustion

	Male	Female
Mean	18.7316	17.9509
Known variance	2.351452742	2.155114846
Observation	272	224
Hypothesised difference	mean .7807	
Z tab	1.960	
P (Z<=z) two tail	<.05	
Z Critical two tail	1.681	

Table 2: Z Test of two samples for means for level of Depersonalisation

	Male	Female
Mean	10.6691	9.9420
Known variance	1.952462548	1.881100742
Observation	272	224
Hypothesised mean difference	.7272	
Z tab	1.960	
P (Z<=z) two tail	<.05	
Z Critical two tail	2.183	

Table 3: Z Test of two samples for means for level of Reduced Personal Accomplishment

	Male	Female
Mean	19.6875	19.9821
Known variance	2.656909859	2.599321065
Observation	272	224
Hypothesised mean difference	.2946	
Z	1.960	
P (Z<=z) two tail	<.05	
Z Critical two tail	.472	

From the above tables, it could be deduced that there is no significant difference in the level of emotional exhaustion of both male and female Non-Teaching staff ($z=1.681$, $P < 0.05$). Hypothesis 1 is therefore accepted. From the same table, it is observable that there is a significant difference in the level of depersonalization of male and female Non-Teaching staff ($z=2.183$, $P < 0.05$). It was observed that the mean scores of male staff are higher than those of female staff. Thus the second hypothesis was rejected. However, the table shows no significant difference in the level of reduced personal accomplishment of male and female staff. ($z=.472$, $P < 0.05$).

Discussion

Results of the data analyses presented in the table that both female and male Non-Teaching staff of Nigerian Universities are experiencing high level of burnout. However, it is confirmed that there is no significant difference in the level of emotional exhaustion and reduced personal accomplishments of staff of both sexes. However, Male Non-Teaching staff experienced more de-personalisation than their female counterparts. Two of the hypotheses were rejected based on the result. The result is a confirmation of earlier studies (Hakanen, 1999; Adekola, 2006). However, the results which indicate that Male Non-Teaching staff experience higher level of de-personalisation than their female counterparts is a further confirmation of the study of the Finnish Institute which emphasized that there is a higher level of cynical attitude among men.

(schaufelli & Enzmann,1988).The result also agrees with those of kalimo & Topinen (1997) which discovered that both sexes differ significantly in the ways they cope with stress. Their conclusion was that women have a wider range of relationship than men and that they use these networks to build up strength with which they cope with burnout. It is observed however that with the level of discrimination being practiced in the treatment of University staff in favour of the Academic staff especially in the salaries and conditions of service, male Non-Teaching staff feels more demoralized than their female counterparts. This may explain higher level of cynicisms among male Non-Teaching Staff than their female counterparts who in most cases are indifferent to such situations. (Adekola, 2010)

Implications of findings and recommendations

The result of this study implies that both sexes do not differ significantly in the experience of burnout. The implication of this study is that biological factor of gender may not be a reasonable starting point for understanding and explaining burnout among staff of Nigerian Universities. It is however recommended that there is an urgent need for to tackle the issue of burnout among staff generally. This can be done by ensuring that staff do have opportunities to have their annual leaves to rest and have a break from their workplace for a change. It is equally recommended that conditions of service as well as parity of treatments for all staff could serve a veritable tool of assisting staff to cope better with burnout in the long run.

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