

Stress Management among Senior Staff Female Administrators in the University of Cape Coast

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Abstract

The issue about work stress has been topical in recent times especially in university administration. The female university administrator is faced with a myriad of challenges in the daily discharge of their duties which end up stressing them. However, little attention has been given to this issue in research cycles in Ghana context. This study therefore focused on examining stress and its management among female administrator (senior staff) in the university of Cape Coast. As a case study, the researchers surveyed a total of 250 female senior staff administrators from academic faculties and other sections/units of the university using a simple random procedure. The results showed that attending meetings, compilation of materials for meetings, time pressures, undefined job schedules, striving to meet deadlines were among the sources of stress for female administrator (senior staff). Also, participants indicated that as a way of managing stress, they shared their problems with colleagues, made enough time to relax, 'allowed some things to go' and a majority also exercised. Finally, the study showed a significant relationship between coping strategy for stress and work experience of the administrator. Based on these findings, the study recommended that management of the university should routinely organize workshops on stress management for staff and also ensure that staffs are made to take their annual leave. These new ideas when imbibed would go a long way to improve the work of women administrators in the country.

Keywords: Work, Stress, Female Administrator (Senior Staff), Stress Management

Introduction

The pressures of modern life, coupled with the demands of a job, can lead to emotional imbalances that are collectively labeled as stress (Harden, 1999). Stress exists in human beings, animals and even in metals. Stress has become a global issue that affects both individuals and groups of individuals in their personal lives and workplaces (Fallon, 1981). As a concept, it has become a word not only used in physics, medicine, psychology and management sciences but also in educational administration in higher institutions. Historically, the epidemic of workplace stress can be seen as a result of changing workplace and economic conditions over the past 20 to 30 years. Hoel et al (2002) explain the changes that have taken place specifically relating to industrialised countries. Modern workers now

find themselves in smaller organisations, with fewer people doing more and feeling much less secure. New technology has added the burden of information overload and accelerated the pace of work. Two major effects that have stemmed from these economic changes are known as 'work intensification' and 'job insecurity'. The former refers to the extent to which employees are being forced to work faster and harder than they have been before, while the latter refers to the subjective feelings about the risk of job loss, as expressed by employees themselves (Burchell, 2002). This new economic culture has created more stressful work environments, as seen through the increasing physical and mental tolls on employees, as well as increasing costs for employers in the way of lost productivity emanating from absenteeism, turnover, and disability leave. It is little wonder then that the 1992 United Nations Report called Stress the 20th Century Epidemic. It was not surprising, therefore when Mirella (1993) described stress as the Big 'S' of the 1990s. This author believes that stress is still a big 'S' in the beginning of the 21st century. In recent years, the body of literature on the subject of university administrators' stress has been continually growing. It is a topic, which has been subjected to considerable scrutiny. Although researches available on the matter are handful, stress among university female administrator (senior staff) has received less attention.

The University of Cape Coast established under section 1 of the University of Cape Coast Act, 1971 (Act 390) and in existence immediately before the commencement of the Law was continued in existence subject to some provisions of the Law. The document stipulates that the University shall continue to be a corporate body which shall have perpetual succession and its common seal capable of suing and being sued in its corporate name. It outlines that the University shall have power to award its own degrees including honorary degrees, diplomas, certificates and other academic distinctions. The aims of the University are to provide higher education to persons suitably qualified and capable of benefiting from such education; to train students in methods of critical and independent thought; making them aware of their responsibility to use their education for the general good of Ghanaian society; and to provide facilities for and engage in teaching and research for the purpose of promoting the advancement and dissemination of learning and knowledge with particular reference to the needs and aspirations of the people of Ghana and in furtherance of co-operation between African States. The registrar's office working in consonance with the teaching staff shall be responsible for the general administration of the University and for providing the secretarial services for bodies and committees in the University. The University Council in accordance with prescriptive procedures outlined by the statutes, engage the services of suitable human resource and other staff of the University as the Council considers necessary for the achievement of the aims of the University and administrators are key to this provision (UCC Statutes, 2012). Stress creates a feeling of psychological, mental, physical, emotional and sometimes spiritual tension that threatens the ability of administrators to cope with challenges associated with their job. Since stress or emotional problems are difficult to diagnose, coping or managing stress or emotional problems become inevitable. The university administrator's job increases every day, from addressing grievances, attending committee and board meetings, writing minutes and reports, supervision and monitoring, integrating morals, attending training and seminars. Stress is virtually impossible to avoid.

Education and Sustainable Development

Higher educational institutions (HEI) have contributions to make to ensure that sustainable development dream of nations can be attained. They may do this by subsequently adopting a methodology appropriate to the overarching goals of the institution to meet the various

challenges presented, and full commitment to achieving sustainable development. This implies that the concept of sustainable development will be applied to the various operations of HEIs. Academic programmes of HEIs are inseparably linked with sustainable developmental agenda in that the strategic plans and programmes of HEIs help to address environmental, social and economic issues which threaten sustainability within the broader context of society.

Sustainable development is development which meets the needs of the present without compromising the ability of future generations to meet their own needs (Cortese, 2003; UNESCO, 2005). In the extensive discussion and use of the concept since then, there has generally been recognition of three aspects of sustainable development namely: economic; environmental and social. An economically sustainable system must be able to produce goods and services on a continuing basis, to maintain manageable levels of government and external debt, and to avoid extreme sectoral imbalances which damage agricultural or industrial production. An environmentally sustainable system must maintain a stable resource base, avoiding over-exploitation of renewable resource systems or environmental sink functions, and depleting non-renewable resources only to the extent that investment is made in adequate substitutes (Cortese, 2003). This includes maintenance of biodiversity, atmospheric stability, and other ecosystem functions not ordinarily classed as economic resources. A socially sustainable system must achieve distributional equity, adequate provision of social services including health and education, gender equity, and political accountability and participation.

The world continues to face various critical challenges such as: human-induced climate change, the rapid depletion of natural resources, the frequency of natural disasters, the spread of (old and new) infectious diseases, the loss of biodiversity, the violation of human rights, increased poverty, the dependency of our economic systems on continuous growth in consumerism and so forth. Sustainable development (SD), with education playing a pioneering role has become a vehicle around the globe for expressing the need to depart from present dominant models of development which appear unable to balance the needs of people and the planet in the pursuit of peace and prosperity (UNESCO, 2005). Sustainable environmental development refers to the development of natural ecosystems in ways that maintain the carrying capacity of the Earth and respect the non-human world. Sustainable economic development (prosperity) focuses on the development of the economic infrastructure, in which the efficient management of our natural and human resources is important. It is the finding of balanced ways to integrate these dimensions in everyday living and working that poses, perhaps, the greatest challenge of our time as this requires alternative ways of thinking, valuing and acting. This is made possible only through quality education which our universities need to provide for citizens. Perhaps, more and more people are beginning to understand and appreciate the contribution of quality education towards achieving sustainable development in our world.

Then what happens to efforts to achieve sustainable development if administrators in our universities who are supposed to work to provide quality education, a prerequisite for sustainable development are 'sickly' due to stress at the work place? Though lifelong education would make possible the acquisition of knowledge, skills and values needed by citizens to improve their quality of life, stress by administrators in tertiary institutions can cut short any desire to realise this dream. As has been documented, right from pre-school to university, education is rethought and reformed to be a vehicle of knowledge, thought

patterns and values needed to build a sustainable world. Quality education helps to raise public awareness about the concept of sustainable development.

This makes it possible to develop enlightened, active and responsible citizenship locally, nationally and internationally. Through education, the human workforce is trained and given a continuous technical and vocational education. Directors and workers, particularly those in trade and industry, get enriched to enable them to adopt sustainable modes of production and consumption. Although there appears widespread consensus about these goals, there is less agreement about the meaning of education for sustainable development (ESD). Just as is the case with SD, there is not one single correct interpretation and use of ESD. Perhaps ESD can be seen as the total sum of diverse ways to arrive at a 'learning society' in which people learn from and with one another and collectively become more capable of withstanding setbacks and dealing with sustainability-induced insecurity, complexity and risks (UNESCO, 2005). From this vantage point, ESD is about - through education and learning - engaging people in SD issues, developing their capacities to give meaning to SD and to contribute to its development and utilizing the diversity represented by all people - including those who have been or feel marginalized - in generating innovative solutions to SD problems and crises; however, as will become clear in this review, this is not the only vantage point. In fact, the creation of the ESD was seen as a means to re-emphasize these overarching goals in a context of SD by emphasizing the role of education and learning. From the discussions, it is clear education plays a critical role in ensuring sustainable development. And yet, stress of administrators in our HEIs can hamper institutions desire and capacity to provide quality education which is a pre-requisite for sustainable development. The nexus between the dimensions of sustainable development, education, stress, quality education and sustainable development has been presented in Figure 1.

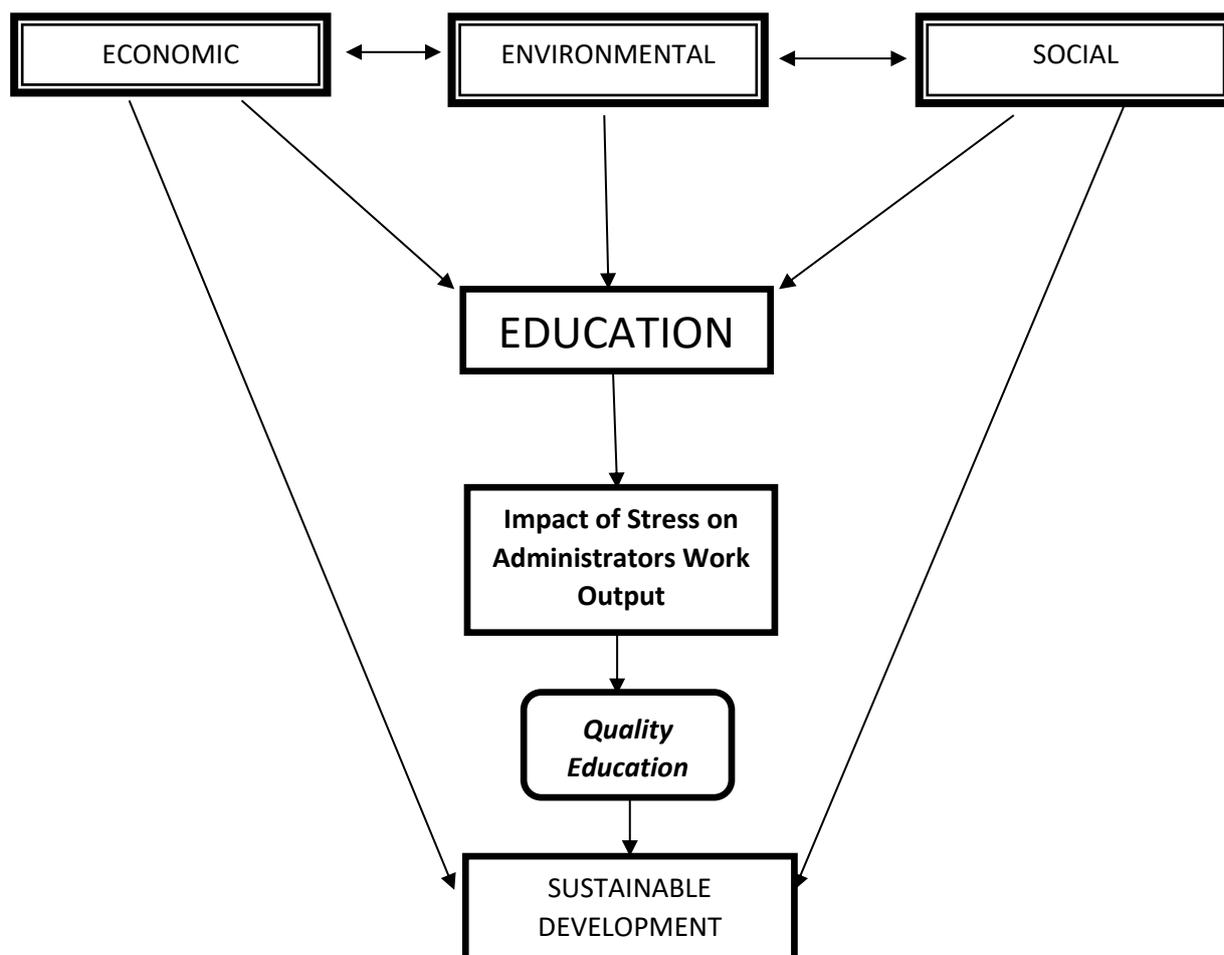


Figure 1. The interconnection between education and sustainable development (Authors derived)

Education seeks to ensure that the three aspects of sustainable development namely: economic; environmental and social dimensions do not elude nations. Stress, the subject matter of this study affects quality of service delivered by administrators in HEIs. Quality education for citizens is thereby affected and the dream for the attainment of sustainable development becomes a mirage.

Statement of the Problem

Cases of work stress are no longer restricted to the Americas, Europe and East Asia. In Africa, cases of stress have also been reported among workers. In Ghana for example, few studies have been conducted on stress among female teachers. At the tertiary level, very few studies have been documented on job stress among administrators despite the vital role University administrators play in the delivery of quality tertiary education. The work schedule of the administrator makes them extremely busy. Practically, they attend meetings, take minutes, supervise, monitor, research, publish, engage in extension services and ensure that deadlines are met. The University administrator is therefore more vulnerable and susceptible to stress than lecturers (Lee, 2003). The female university administrator, specifically, is more challenged in dealing with stress since she would have to manage her home first by making sure that the home is given a conducive environment for the sustenance of her family is more liable stress than their male counterparts. When female administrators (senior staff) do not

perform their statutory responsibilities because of stress, the management of their faculties, sections, units and divisions suffers negatively. But “what are the major sources and perceived effects of stress on work output?” and “what coping strategies do female senior staff administrators in the University of Cape Coast adopt in dealing stress?” These are but some of the questions this study seeks answers to.

Purpose of the Study

The purpose of this study is therefore to examine the management of stress among female senior staff administrators and possible recommendations made to employers to take actions to reduce stress among administrators in general at the workplace. Specifically, the objectives of the study includes finding out the major sources and perceived effects of stress on work output. Again, the objective of the study is to ascertain the stress management techniques used in dealing with stress and whether a significant relationship exists between coping strategy for stress and experience of the female senior staff administrator.

Research Questions

The study was guided by three research questions and a hypothesis as follows:

1. What are the sources of stress among female senior staff administrators in the University of Cape Coast?
2. What are the perceived effects of stress among female administrators in the University of Cape Coast?
3. What are the coping strategies often adopted by female senior staff administrators in dealing with work stress?

Hypothesis

1. H_0 : There is no significant relationship between coping strategy for stress and work experience of the female senior staff administrator.

Significance of the Study

The findings of the study would provide insight to Management of the University about the possible sources of stress and provide the necessary interventions to help reduce stress and its negative consequences on work output. This study would also help University administrators especially the female administrator (senior staff) to adopt appropriate coping strategies to control stressors so as to be able to operate at a more productive, effective and efficient level. This would reduce health care cost, enhance academic excellence, and enhance work productivity in the University system. The report would also serve as literature for future studies on stress among workers in Ghana.

Overview of Literature

Cox's (1978) Transactional Theory of Stress

According to the Transaction Theory of stress, the cognitive appraisal of stress is a two-part process which involves a primary appraisal and a secondary appraisal. Primary appraisal involves the determination of an event as stressful. During primary appraisal, the event or situation can be categorized as irrelevant, beneficial, or stressful. If the event is appraised as stressful, the event is then evaluated as a harm/loss, a threat, or a challenge. A harm/loss refers to an injury or damage that has already taken place. A threat refers to something that could produce harm or loss. A challenge event refers to the potential for growth, mastery, or

some form of gain. One cannot assess the origins of stress by looking solely at the nature of the environmental event; rather stress is a process that involves the interaction of the individual with the environment. These categories are based mostly on one's own prior experiences and learning. Also, each of these categories generates different emotional responses. Harm/loss stressors can elicit anger, disgust, sadness, or disappointment. Threatening stressors can produce anxiety and challenging stressors can produce excitement. This theory helps to integrate both the motivational aspects of stress and the varying emotions that are associated with the experience of stress. Secondary appraisal occurs after assessment of the event as a threat or a challenge. During secondary appraisal the individual now evaluates his or her coping resources and options. According to the theory of transactions, stress arises only when a particular transaction is appraised by the person as relevant to his or her well-being. In order for an event to be appraised as a stressor, it must be personally relevant and there must be a perceived mismatch between a situation's demands and one's resources to cope with it. However, other studies have offered a reformulation of the Transaction theory, which focuses on the emotional consequences of appraising an event as a stressor or as a challenge. Those with this view have asserted that when an event is appraised as a challenge, it leads to different physiological consequences than when it is appraised as a harm/loss or threat. Culture and society may shape what events are perceived as stressful, what coping strategies are acceptable to use in a particular society, and what institutional mechanisms we may turn to for assistance. The nexus among stress and its interactive variables in the transactional model of stress according to Cox (1978) have been displayed in Figure 1.

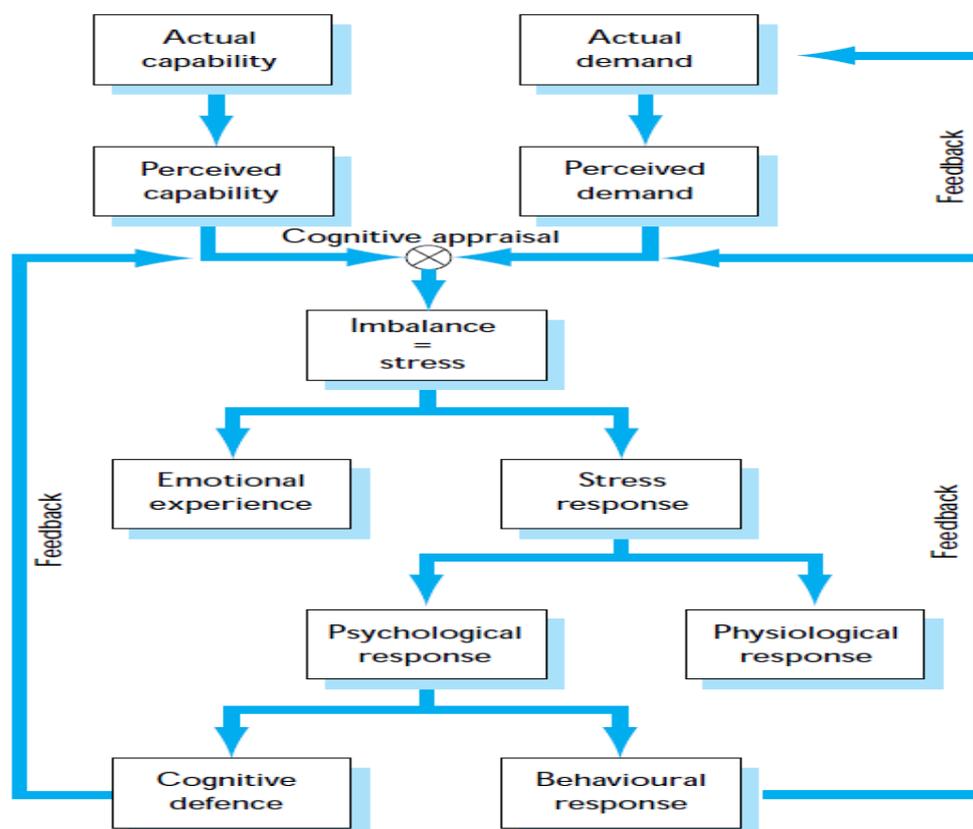


Figure 2. Transactional Model of Stress by Cox (1978).

Mandler (1982) also argues that a definition focusing on the physiological aspects of stress is too narrow. He suggests that stress refers most appropriately to the convergence of the physiological and psychological effects of stressors. He maintains that only when stressors and their physiological responses affect behavior, thought, or action do they become relevant to the stress concept. Like Selye, he notes that all types of stressors, ranging from extreme temperature to the death of a friend, affect the nervous system in the same way but may differ in their psychological or emotional effects. For the purpose of this report, we consider Mandler's psychological results of stress as part of the performance effects of stress and use the term stress to refer only to the physiological response. The demands of the administrator's work provide a lot stress for them in the workplace. This phenomenon is a growing concern in the current state of the economy, where employees increasingly face conditions of overwork, job insecurity, low levels of job satisfaction, and lack of autonomy. Workplace stress has been shown to have a detrimental effect on the health and wellbeing of employees, as well as a negative impact on workplace productivity and profits. There are measures that individuals and organisations can take to alleviate the negative impact of stress, or to stop it from arising in the first place.

However, there is a need to determine the source of employees stress in the university set up and an urgent need as well to determine the effects of stress on work output (Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety, 2000). For many people, every day stressors keep this response activated, so that it does not have a chance to turn off. Survey results have shown that workplace stress is a growing problem among working people (Canadian Mental Health Association, 2001). The Canadian Centre for Occupational Health and Safety (2000) for instance has defined workplace stress as the harmful physical and emotional responses that can result from conflicts between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands. Experiencing lower levels of stress at work can actually be a motivator and serve to increase productivity in employees. However, it becomes problematic when stress occurs in amounts that individuals can no longer manage. Figure 2 portrays stressors and the stress responses of workers in an organisation.

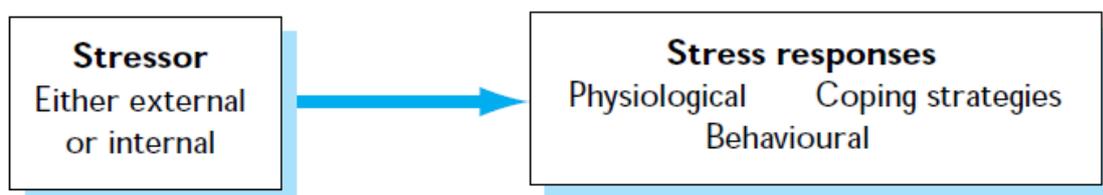


Figure 2: Stressors and the Stress Responses of Workers in an Organisation.

In our view, stress is the reactions of individuals to new or frightening factors in their work environment (both internal and external). The work environment such as the one in the University of Cape Coast often contains new situations which give gives birth to stress responses. This notion presupposes suggests that stress is inevitable and the reactions to stressful situations are individualised. According to Andrea (2006), there is no difference between good stress and bad stress. They are both created by thinking about the future. When anxiety finds an outlet, we say that the stress was motivating; when it doesn't, we call it debilitating. Frese (1985) also emphasised the idea that stress itself is not necessarily bad.

Source of Stress

Pearlin (1982) suggests that society, its value systems, the stratified ordering of its populations, the organisation of its institutions, and the rapidity and extent of changes in these elements can be sources of stress. Hoel and Giga (2003) concluded that high rates of mergers, acquisitions, increasing economic interdependence among countries due to globalization, technological development, and restructuring have changed the Organisational work over the last few decades have resulted in time pressure, excessive work demand, role conflicts, ergonomic insufficiencies and problematic customer relationship are causes of stress. Stressors can be divided into those that arise from within an individual (internal), and those that are attributable to the environment (external). Internal conflicts, non-specific fears, fears of inadequacy, and guilt feelings are examples of stressors that do not depend on the environment. Internal sources of stress can arise from an individual's perceptions of an environmental threat, even if no such danger actually exists. Environmental stressors are external conditions beyond an individual's control. Bhagat, Krishnan, Nelson, Leonard, Leonard, Ford Jr, et al (2010) have reported that work performance can be seriously impaired by external stressors. There are many aspects of organisational life that can become external stressors. These include issues of structure, management's use of authority, monotony, a lack of opportunity for advancement, excessive responsibilities, ambiguous demands, value conflicts, and unrealistic workloads. A person's non-working life (e.g., family, friends, health, and financial situations) can also contain stressors that negatively impact job performance. It is believed that society's number one health problem is anxiety, and that emotionally induced stress can be classified into four categories: time stress; anticipatory stress; situational stress, and encounter stress. Time stress is always created by a real or imaginary deadline whereas anticipatory stress is created when a person perceives that an upcoming event will be unpleasant (Fredrickson, 2004). Situational stress can occur when a person is in an unpleasant situation, and they worry about what will happen next.

Encounter stress is created by contact with other people (both pleasant and unpleasant). Many situations in organisational life can be stressful. These include: problems with the physical environment such as poor lighting or excessive noise; problems with the quality of work such, as lack of diversity, an excessive pace, or too little work; role ambiguities or conflicts in responsibilities; relationships with supervisors, peers, and subordinates, and career development stressors, such as lack of job security, perceived obsolescence, and inadequate advancement (Fredrickson, 2004). Adverse working conditions, such as excessive noise, extreme temperatures, or overcrowding, can be a source of job-related stress. According to Cooper, Liukkonen, and Cartwright (1996), stress arise from a wide range of work circumstances and becomes worse due to lack of support, low skill discretions, high job demands and organisational conditions (Hallin & Danielson, 2007). Arnold and Feldman (1986) emphasize the deleterious effects of role ambiguity, conflict, overload and underload. Role ambiguity is often the result of mergers, acquisitions and restructuring, where employees are unsure of their new job responsibilities. Role conflict has been categorised in some studies into two types: inter-sender and intra-sender. Inter-sender role conflict can occur when workers perceive that two different sources are generating incompatible demands or expectations.

Intra-sender role conflict can arise when workers perceive conflicting demands from the same source. Overload is frequently created by excessive time pressures, where stress increases as a deadline approaches, and then rapidly subsides. Under load is the result of an insufficient quantity, or an inadequate variety of work. Both overload and under-load can result in low

self-esteem and stress related symptoms, however, under load has also been associated with passivity and general feelings of apathy. Also, poor interpersonal relationships are also a common source of stress in organisations. Arnold and Feldman (1986) cite three types of interpersonal relationships that can evoke a stress reaction: 1) too much prolonged contact with other people, 2) too much contact with people from other departments, and 3) an unfriendly or hostile organisational climate.

Effects of Stress

The ratio of people affected by stress in organisation is increasing at an alarming rate and this situation affects both the employee performance and goal achievement (Treven, 2005). Stress is a term that refers to sum of physical mental emotional strains or tensions on a person or feelings of stress which result from interactions between people and their environment that are perceived as straining or exceeding their adaptive capacities and threatening their well being, in addition stress has a wide psychological and physical effect as cardiovascular, headache, sleep disturbance and depression (Ghaleb & Thuria, 2008). Job stress is a challenge for employers because high level of it results in low productivity, increased absenteeism and collection to other employee problems like alcoholism and a host of other problems (Meneze, 2005). In fact, other studies have emphasised that stress is a necessary part of life and that it does not always involve negative consequences for the organism involved. Indeed, at certain moderate levels, stress can actually improve individual performance. Muse, Harris, and Field (2003) argue that stress at any level reduces task performance by draining an individual's energy, concentration, and time. Vroom (1964) offers a similar explanation, suggesting that physiological responses caused by stressors impair performance. Some psychologists even suggest a linear positive relationship between stress and performance. Stress can affect an individual's decision making process and ability to make effective judgments.

Stress Management

Stress Management is an important act to eradicate occupational stress. Cooper (1998) in the Oxford University Press defines it as the act of developing emotional and physical changes to control and reduce stress. It involves identifying the source of stress and the effects of stress on health and personal skills. In previous researches, stress management interventions have been seen to rapidly reduce stress symptoms. The identification of interventions for stress management is therefore important (Amponsah, 2010). Many workers express that their job is a prominent source of stress in their life but reduced workload, improve management and supervision, better pay, benefits, and vacation times can reduce the stress among employees ((Fredrickson, 2004; Dewa, Thompson, & Jacobs, 2011). Workplaces that either provide or facilitate opportunities for employees to engage in effective coping strategies are more likely to foster less stress for employees (Ongori & Agolla, 2008) Promoting activities like exercise, relaxation activities, and other healthy practices can contribute significantly to improved work climate and personal stress management through effective coping (Khoshaba & Maddi, 2005). Social support can also be provided by and promoting and providing opportunities for positive social interactions, cooperation, responsibility, and innovation (Fredrickson, 2004). Pearlin (1982) observes that individuals' coping strategies are primarily social in nature.

One approach is usually referred to as stressor management which focuses on situational factors and methods of reducing demands of the situation on an individual. The other stress management approach, focuses on the behavioural cognitive or the physiological components of an individual's response in an effort to permit calmer response to the

demanding situation. The coping strategies are: maintaining good physical health program, withdrawal and re-charging, intellectual, social and spiritual support, positive attitude, realistic perspective, increased involvement, time management and organisation (Frese, 1985). The role of management becomes one of maintaining an appropriate level of stress by providing an optimal environment, and by doing a good job in areas such as performance planning, role analysis, work redesign/job enrichment, continuing feedback, ecological considerations, and interpersonal skills training. In conclusion, since stress cannot be avoided, identification of effective coping strategies may provide administrators with the tools, which can be used to reduce the amount of stress in their environment and to moderate the effect of stress on them (Cox et al., 2002). It must be clear that age can influence the type of workplace stress experienced, but it tends to be specific to certain aspects of the job. For example, in a study conducted by Kompier and Kristensen (2001), more workers over the age of 45 felt stress as a result of having to learn computer skills, as compared to workers between the ages of 15 and 24. Young employees were significantly less likely than older employees to feel that too many hours / too many demands were a source of stress. Lastly, it was reported by Wichert (2002) that with respect to job security, older employees tend to experience less stress than their younger counterparts but the more one stays on a job, the more they acquire the experience to deal with stress. And so with respect to work experience, research has shown that people with more working experience tend to cope or manage stress well compared to novices on the job.

Methodology

Design

The case study approach in the form of a descriptive survey design was used to gather evidence to interrogate the research questions and the hypothesis for the study. This design permitted the researchers to describe the phenomenon of stress as it pertained currently to female senior staff administrators in the University of Cape Coast.

Population

The target population for the study comprised all senior staff administrators in the university of Cooper et al (1996) number about one thousand two hundred (1200). The accessible population however, comprised about five hundred (500) female senior staff administrators in the university Cooper et al (1996) work tirelessly to complement efforts of the teaching staff to ensure quality learning. Out of this number, the final sample was selected.

Sampling and Sampling Procedure

Two hundred and fifty (250) female senior staff administrators were sampled using simple random sampling technique since the researchers considered all senior staff administrators as having homogeneous characteristics. These academic faculties, schools, sections/units were put into strata before the simple random sampling technique was used to select the participants.

Instruments

An instrument titled Job-Related Stressors and Stress Management Techniques of Academic Administrators Questionnaire (JSSTACQ) was adapted and used to obtain data from the respondents on the sources, its perceived effects and stress management techniques. The instrument consisted of twenty seven items (27) close-ended questions and two (2) open-

ended items which comprised principally three sections. The preamble of the questionnaire gathered biographic information on respondents. Section A contained two items which sought information on the sources of stress whereas section B was aimed at obtaining data on the perceived effects of stress on work output. The last section sought information on stress management techniques of administrators. The items turned out to have high content validity since a reliability coefficient of 0.82 was obtained after it was pilot-tested on twenty two (22) administrators at the Cape Coast Polytechnic. The research instrument was personally administered on the respondents by the researchers with the help of two (2) junior staff administrators in the university of Cape Coast. In all, 239 of the questionnaires representing 95.6% were retrieved.

Analysis of Data

The analysis of data was structured in accordance with the demands of the specific research questions. Descriptive statistics of frequencies, percentages, means were used whereas the Pearson Product Moment

Correlation Coefficient (r) was also used to test the hypothesis. The SPSS version 16.0 was used for the inferential statistical analysis.

Finding and Discussions

Profile of Participants

Background information about senior staff female administrators has been displayed to through light on respondents who were used for the study. Table 1 shows the profile distribution in this regard.

Table 1:

Profile Distribution of Senior Staff Female Administrators used for the Study

Variables	Frequency	%
Age		
21 – 30 Years	118	49.3
31 – 40 Years	74	31.0
41 – 50 Years	35	14.6
50 Years and Above	12	5.0
TOTAL	239	100
Number of Years (Experience)		
1 – 5	91	38.0
6 – 10	107	44.7
11 – 15	27	11.2
16 – 20	12	5.0
20 Years and Above	2	0.8
TOTAL	239	100
Rank		
Administrative Assistant	103	43.0
Senior Administrative Assistant	82	34.3
Principal Administrative Assistant	45	18.8
Chief Administrative Assistant	9	3.7
TOTAL	239	100

Source: Field Survey, 2014

From Table 1, it is clear that 118(49.3%) participants were aged between 21 and 30 years, 74(30.9%) between the ages of 31 and 40, thirty five (14.6%) between ages 41 and 50 whereas 12(5.0%) were aged between 50 years and above. With regard to number of years they have worked, 91(38.0%) have between one to five years experience, and 107(44.7%) have between six to ten years experience. The rest 27(11.2%) have worked between 11 and 15 years, 12(5.0%) between 16 and 20 years and only two (0.8%) had worked for over twenty years as administrators in the university. Also, in terms of their rank, 103(43.0%) were administrative assistants, 82(34.3%) were senior administrative assistants, 45(18.8%) were principal administrative assistants and only nine (3.7%) had attained the rank of chief administrative assistant. From the profile it is obvious that these respondents were relatively experienced and were matured to respond professionally to issues raised in the study.

Research Question 1

What are the sources of stress among female senior staff administrators in the University of Cape Coast?

Participants were asked to rank activities they considered sources of stress in the exercise of their duties as administrators. Among these items, the highly rated activities which according to participants, constitute major sources of stress for them include attending meetings (84.9%), compiling materials for meetings (83.6%), striving to meet deadlines (88.2%), and undefined job schedules (65.6%). On the contrary, activities which were not highly rated as source of stress included poor relationship with colleagues (17.1%), limited opportunity to partake in decision pertaining to their job (27.6%), lack of career support from colleagues and superiors (29.7%), lack of security and confidence (12.1%), poor physical working conditions (43.5%), not adequately rewarded in remuneration (50.6%) and not appreciated by superiors were the activities which did not give them stress. Some of them also wrote that issues of superiors' use of authority, monotony of their work schedules, a lack of opportunity for advancement and promotion when they are due, excessive responsibilities they are sometimes assigned to do, ambiguous demands and unrealistic workloads pose as stressors to them.

Research Question 2

What are the perceived effects of stress among female administrators in the University of Cape Coast?

Respondents were requested to indicate the perceived effects of stress on their work output. Generally, the majority 195(81.5%) agreed that due to stress, they are not enthused by what they do as administrators. One hundred and fifty three (64.0%) agreed that they sometimes find it difficult to concentrate at the work place due to work-induced stress. Again, 128(53.5%) admitted that they are unable to sleep well due to work stress and that they got easily anxious and irritated due to what they go through at the work place. Also, 177(74.0%) of them agreed that due to stress, they are unable to accomplish tasks assigned to them by their superiors. A mean rating of 4.4 was obtained on these captioned items. The majority also explained (through writing via the open-ended question) that stress had negative effect on their work output. They intimated that work stress is largely associated with low work output since it stifles employee creativity and cripples desire and motivation for excellence.

Research Question 3

What are the coping strategies often adopted by female senior staff administrators to deal with work stress?

Respondents were requested here to indicate by ticking on a five-point scale, the strategy they used to manage stress at the work place. Table 2 shows the outcome of that survey.

Table 2:

Responses of Female Administrators on Coping Strategies Adopted in Dealing with Work-Stress

Item	RESPONSE		RATINGS			Total (%)	Mean
	5 (%)	4 (%)	3 (%)	2 (%)	1 (%)		
I decide to take a break or relax due to stress	33(13.8)	100(41.8)	64(26.7)	31(12.9)	11(4.6)	239(100)	3.4
I share my problems with colleagues	55(23.0)	123(51.4)	25(10.4)	27(11.2)	9(3.7)	239(100)	3.7
I make sure I get enough time to relax	92(38.4)	70(29.3)	47(19.6)	19(8.0)	11(4.6)	239(100)	3.8
I manage my time well to deal with undue stress	32(13.3)	33(13.8)	108(45.1)	41(17.1)	25(10.4)	239(100)	3.0
I do physical activities anytime I am stressed	76(31.7)	107(44.8)	47(19.6)	1(0.4)	8(3.3)	239(100)	4.0
I take alcohol when I am stressed	0(0)	0(0)	29(12.1)	58(24.2)	152(63.6)	239(100)	1.4
I abstain from work when I am stressed up	3(1.2)	2(0.8)	15(6.2)	12(5.0)	207(86.6)	239(100)	1.2
I 'allow some things to go' when I get stressed	114(47.7)	101(42.2)	19(8.0)	1(0.4)	4(1.7)	239(100)	4.3
I establish my priorities in order to deal with stress	125(52.3)	61(25.5)	41(17.1)	11(4.6)	1(0.4)	239(100)	4.2
I establish healthy relationship as a way of dealing with stress	45(18.8)	109(45.6)	62(25.9)	22(9.2)	1(0.4)	239(100)	3.7
I eat balanced diet to manage stress at work	15(6.2)	90(37.6)	83(34.7)	44(18.4)	7(2.9)	239(100)	3.2
I avoid scheduling too many appointments	55(23.0)	100(41.8)	75(31.3)	6(2.4)	3(1.2)	239(100)	3.8

Key: Never – 1, Seldom – 2, Sometimes – 3, Often – 4, Always – 5

Source: Field Survey, 2014

It can be gleaned from Table 2 that 178(74.4%) of the administrators indicated that they share their problems with colleagues as a way of managing stress. A mean rating of 3.7, approximately 4.0 was obtained for this item implying that the majority often share their problems as a strategy for managing stress. On the contrary, 9(3.7%) of them indicated that they never share their problems with colleagues. A mean rating of 3.8 was obtained indicating that a majority of the administrators 162(67.7%) responded that they make enough time to relax even though 47(19.6%) sometimes do that, 19(8.0%) seldom do that and 11(4.6%) never make time to relax a strategy for work stress management. Again, 215(89.8%) responded that they 'allow some things to go' when or anytime they are stressed whereas 19(8.0%) said sometimes they do this. An average rating of 4.3 for this item goes to show that a majority of the female administrators often 'allow some things to go' as a coping strategy for work stress. What this means is that they do not allow everything to bother them so much at the work place in order to distress. Again, a majority of them 183(76.5%) responded that they do physical activities anytime they are stressed even though even though 47(19.6%) admitted doing this sometimes. The average rating of 4.0 implies that a majority of the female administrators intimated they often exercised to manage their stress. Interestingly, 65(27.1%) also responded that they manage time well to deal with undue stress at the work place. This item received a mean rating of 3.0 meaning that the participants sometimes prudently manage time as a strategy to deal with stress. On the issue of establishing priorities in dealing with stress, 185(77.8%) intimated that they often prioritize their schedules to deal with stress. In relation to this item, 155(64.8%) indicated they often avoid scheduling too many appointments in order not to be stressed. The mean rating of 3.2 shows that the majority of the administrators said the sometimes they eat balanced diet to manage work stress.

Hypothesis

H₀: There is no significant relationship between coping strategy for stress and work experience of the female senior staff administrator.

The study researchers tested for significance in relationship between coping strategy and work experience of the administrator. The testing was done at 0.05 alpha level using SPSS. The probability value obtained was then compared with the alpha level to determine statistical significance between the variables. (Coping Strategy and Experience). Since the hypothesis is a non-directional one, the correlation coefficient determines whether the relationship is direct or indirect. Table 3 presents the outcome of the hypothesis.

Table 3:

Relationship Between Administrators' Work Experience and Effective Strategy for Coping with Stress

Correlations

	Effstrategy	Experience
Effstrategy Pearson Correlation	1	.632
Sig. (2-tailed)		.027
N	239	239
Experience Pearson Correlation	.632	1
Sig. (2-tailed)	.027	
N	239	239

Effstrategy = effective strategy for coping with stress

Source: Field Survey, 2014

From the Table 3, the write up is: $r(239) = .632, p < .05$. Alternatively, it could be written as: $r(239) = .632, p = .027$. From here, it is clear that the p-value is less than alpha ($p = .027 < \alpha = .05$). Since this is so, the null hypothesis is thus rejected and a conclusion made on the alternative hypothesis that a significant (positive) relationship exists between coping stress and work experience of the administrator. This implies that the number of years a person (in this case, the female administrator) has worked is positively related to the effectiveness of their coping strategies. In other words, the more an administrator gathers more experience on the job, the more capable they are in managing stress effectively. The relationship is direct ($r = .63$) meaning that stress is managed effectively by administrators Cooper, Liukkonen, Cartwright, (1996) have worked as administrators for many years.

Conclusions

One cannot deny the fact that workplace stress is a growing problem among working people especially among female administrators (Cooper et al., 1996). They routinely attend meetings, strive to meet deadlines and flirt with the impossible on daily basis to meet the heavy demands of their employers. In the university of Cape Coast where this study was set, female administrators consider some of these as sources of stress. The output of this study concurs with an earlier one conducted by Bhagat et al (2010) (1983) which reported that work performance can be seriously impaired by external stressors which include issues of structure, superiors' use of authority, monotony, a lack of opportunity for advancement, excessive responsibilities, ambiguous demands, value conflicts, and unrealistic workloads. That study posited that society's number one health problem is anxiety, and that emotionally induced stress can be classified into four categories: time stress; anticipatory stress; situational stress, and encounter stress. With the administrators, they expressed disquiet about the excessive demands made on them by their superiors.

It came to the fore that stress, no matter how small it might look, has negative effects on work output. The result of this research concurs with the ones done by Meneze (2005); Muse et al (2003); Vroom (1964) which report that job stress is a challenge for employers because high level of it results in low productivity among others. For instance, according to Muse, Harris, and Field (2003), stress at any level reduces task performance by draining an

individual's energy, concentration, and time even though it, at certain moderate levels, can actually improve individual performance. Vroom (1964) also long time ago, offered a similar explanation, suggesting that physiological responses caused by stressors impair performance. And yet, other studies have emphasised that stress is a necessary part of life and that it does not always involve negative consequences for the organism involved.

It is insightful to note also that due to the debilitating effects of stress on work output it becomes imperative to put in place mechanisms to reduce its effects on organisational performance. This puts pressure on leadership of organisations such as universities to put in place 'stressor management mechanisms' to deal with employee stress. As Kelehear (2004) puts it, the role of management becomes one of maintaining an appropriate level of stress by providing an optimal environment, and by doing a good job in areas such as performance planning, role analysis, work redesign/job enrichment, continuing feedback, ecological considerations, and interpersonal skills training to improve work output. The result of the current study is in line with an earlier one by Frese (1985) which revealed very rewarding coping strategies such as: maintaining good physical health, withdrawal and re-charging, intellectual, social and spiritual support, positive attitude, realistic perspective, increased involvement, time management among others. In this study too, participants had mentioned some of these as strategies they use in managing stress. Similarly, Amponsah (2010) suggests a linear positive relationship between stress and performance. He explains that stress affect an individual's decision making process and ability to make effective judgments. In the light of this, it behoves on management of organisations to either provide or facilitate opportunities for employees to engage in effective coping strategies in order to foster less stress for them. Promoting activities like exercise, relaxation activities, and other healthy practices can contribute significantly to improved work climate and personal stress management (Khoshaba & Maddi, 2005). However, Fredrickson (2004); Dewa et al (2011) indicate that many workers said their job is a prominent source of stress in their life but reduced workload, improve management and supervision, better pay, benefits, and vacation times can reduce the stress among employees.

Finally, the study revealed that there is a significant direct correlation between experience and coping strategy. This outcome is incongruent with the study done by Kompier and Kristensen (2001) which revealed among other things that age was the variable that can influence the type and extent of workplace stress experienced. For example, in that study, Kompier and Kristensen (2001), opined that more workers over the age of 45 felt stress as a result of having to learn computer skills, as compared to workers between the ages of 15 and 24. Young employees were significantly less likely than older employees to feel that too many hours / too many demands were a source of stress. Nonetheless, the result of the current study has revealed a similar finding as the work that Wichert (2002) did. He reported in his study that with respect to job security, older employees tend to experience less stress than their younger counterparts and that the more one stays on a job, the more they acquire the experience to deal with stress. In other words, with respect to work experience, this study has shown that administrators with more years of working experience tend to cope or manage stress well compared to novices on the job.

In sum, it is obvious that stress is a canker which robs individuals, organizations/institutions and societies of high productivity. Therefore, all hands must be on deck to ensure that stress and its effects are reduced if not completely eradicated among university administrators in Ghana.

Recommendations

In view of the findings, the following are suggested to improve administrative practices in Ghanaian universities.

1. Just as Williams and Huber (1986) suggest, in order to reduce stress among workers, superior (senior-member administrators) should clarify task assignments and responsibility and clearly spell out criteria for performance evaluation for senior staff administrators so as to avoid conflicts which often arise from undefined work schedules.
2. Tasks should occasionally be delegated to senior staff administrators as a way of effectively increasing employee confidence and individual autonomy where the situation warrants it.
3. Rules regarding mandatory vacations/leaves, break periods and the working hours allotted to workers should be strictly enforced by the personnel division of the university to ensure that administrators are not unduly over-tasked.
4. University management should come out with health maintenance programmes to deal with stress, the necessity for proper dieting, exercise and social support systems that can sufficiently equip employees in dealing with the deleterious effects of stress. University authorities should provide a nurturing environment that builds self-esteem, and makes one less susceptible to stress.
5. A university-wide package should be instituted to reward employees for jobs well done to motivate others to follow suit. In this regard, there should be a strong collaboration between mentors and mentees such that social support is given to

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