STRESS MANAGEMENT FOR ACADEMIC LIBRARIANS IN FESTUS AGHAGBO LIBRARY NIGERIA.

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Abstract

This paper aims to awaken academic librarians to the stress management techniques needful in escaping stress emanating from current trends in academic librarianship. The study is based on literature review, documentary analyses, commentary and casual observation of academic librarians in Nigeria. The study found out that academic librarians are stressed by their direct job profile, enormous career progression demands and domestic imperatives. Unless they are timely equipped with the basics of stress management, they will continue to fall victim of stress-induced-illnesses and even death. The paper however warned academic librarians in Nigeria of the stressors in their career and outlined some stress remedies that may be of interest to them.

Keywords: Stress, Stressors, Job Related Stress, Librarian's Job Prifile, Stress Management Techniques, Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library.

Introduction

The term "stress", as it is currently used was coined by Hans Selye in 1936. He defined stress as "the non-specific response of the body to any demand for change" *(American Institute of Stress,* n.d). Stress in a medical or biological context is a physical, mental, or emotional factor that causes bodily or mental tension (MedicineNet, 2014). *The Free Dictionary* (n.d.) define stress as an organism's total response to environmental demands or pressures. According to *Cambridge Dictionary* (n.d.) stress means great worry caused by a difficult situation, or something that causes this condition.

There are varying definitions of the word "stress" depending on the view or purpose of the author. In the context of this paper, stress mean a condition or feeling experienced when a person perceives that demands exceed the personal and social resources the individual is able to mobilize (Lazarus,1966). This means that we experience stress if we believe that we do not have the time, resources, or knowledge to handle a situation. We experience stress when we feel "out of control"(Mind Tools, n.d.).

Simply stress occurs when the pressure is more than the resources. According to Nordqvist, (2015) when faced with a challenge or a threat, our body activates resources to protect itself - to either get away as fast as it can (flight), or fight. Our fight-or-flight response is the body's sympathetic nervous system reacting to a stressful event. Our body produces larger quantities of the chemicals cortisol, adrenaline and non-adrenaline, which trigger a higher heart rate, heightened muscle preparedness, sweating, and alertness - all these factors help us protect ourselves in a dangerous or challenging situation. Then non-essential body functions slow down, such as our digestive and immune

systems when we are in fight-or flight response mode. All resources can then be concentrated on rapid breathing, blood flow, alertness and muscle use.

Stress is not wholly harmful, there can be good or bad stress. Some stress can of course be beneficial. The pressure it exerts can be an incentive to accomplish necessary goals. On the other hand, it can be quite harmful as it has been related to illnesses like cardiovascular diseases, immune diseases, asthma, diabetes, digestive disorders, ulcers, headaches, migraines, pre-menstrual syndrome, depression and psoriasis (Khan ,2010).
Management here means "the act or manner of managing; handling, direction, or control"(Dictionary.com,n.d.). Stress management therefore implies taking charge of your lifestyle, thoughts, emotions, and the way you deal with problems. Stress management is therefore very important because no matter how stressful your life seems, there are steps you can take to relieve the pressure and regain control. It has to do with healthier ways to cope with stress, help reduce its harmful effects, and prevent stress from getting out of control again in the future. Stress management also involves changing the stressful situation when you can, changing your reaction when you can not and taking care of yourself (HelpGuide.org,2016).

Among the most stressed group of people in Nigeria are the professionals and working-class including academic librarians. This group combines workplace stress with that of normal life environment. Workplace stress can be seen as th harmful physical and emotional responses that can happen when there is a conflict between job demands on the employee and the amount of control an employee has over meeting these demands (Canadian Centre,n.d..). This implies that the combination of high demands in a job and a low amount of control over the situation can lead to stress.

On its part, the World Health Organization (n.d..) sees workplace stress as the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressure that are not matched with their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. For the academic librarians generally, the workplace is routinely over loaded with acquisition, cataloguing, circulation, serials, reference and administrative schedules. Added to these, academic librarians in Nigeria face other stress triggering jobs arising from promotion criteria and demand to offer traditional library services on ICT platform.
'I am stressed', 'this is very stressful' and 'stress is too much' are very common cliché in the daily utterances of academic librarians. It then becomes imperative and timely to probe into the stressors in the lives of academic librarians in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library with a view of proffering suiting stress management styles in order to promote, preserve and prolong the career and domestic lives of the academic librarians.

Literature review

Stress among professionals has been acknowledged to be on the increase around the globe. A lot of research has been conducted on stress generally and work related stress and its management. Also, academic librarians' emerging work profile and its relationship with stress has attracted some research as well on librarians. Ennis (2005) examined stress experienced as a result of the changing role of librarians, increased workload and four other factors related to the

use of technology. Her result showed that the pace of change, lack of standardization, and technology-related expectations of users were experienced as most stressful by the librarians. Siamian *et al* (2006) also observed that in recent years, there is growing research supporting the existence of burnout among academic librarians. There are many suggestions to prevent or remedy this condition on librarians; some of the solutions are targeted at the individual. In sum, they noted that very little has been done to measure the effectiveness of these remedies in preventing, ameliorating or eliminating the problem of burnout in librarianship.

In her research, using survey and interview methodology, Affleck (1996) examined the burnout in bibliographic instruction of librarians from colleges in New England. Her results suggested that more than half of the librarians were experiencing at least one dimension of burnout and 8.5% were experiencing all three dimensions (emotional exhaustion, de-personalization and lack of personal accomplishment), indicating full-blown burnout. The study also suggested the burnout was at least partially a result of role-related factors.

There are also some studies on stress and stress management among academic librarians in Nigeria. A survey- design study was carried out by Ekwelem (2015) to find out the job related stress and coping strategies among academic librarians in universities in South-East Nigeria. The study found out that those academic librarians in the zone experience considerable stress on the job irrespective of sex, designation and work place. The result also identified some coping strategies used by the librarians to include maintaining a sense of humour, delegating responsibility, relaxation and other stress management techniques.

'Managing stress among librarians in selected university libraries in Ogun State Nigeria' is the title of a study carried out by Ilo in 2016.

The main objective of the survey is to examine the coping patterns of librarians with job stress in both private and public universities. Interestingly, the study revealed that female librarians reported higher level of job stress than their male counterparts. It found out that job stress has significant effect on effectiveness of librarians in university libraries. It also identified the coping strategies librarians can use to include social withdrawal, emotional regulation and wishful thinking.

Stress cannot be obliterated in the lives of academic librarians. According to Ilo (2016), librarians can only overcome stress when they recognize that it is more beneficial to manage it than to experience its effects. Roy (2005) maintain that awareness of all the aspects of stress, familiarity with the situation that generate stress are all very important steps in the process of stress management. When we identify the existence and effects of stress on our lives, we should be able to manage its source positively or as librarians change our perception towards it (Routray and Satpathy, 2007).

Job Profile and Skills of the Academic Librarian

Academic librarians in the universities face very busy and highly unpredictable work days with many individuals and groups competing for their time(Ekwelem 2015). The typical Nigerian academic librarian daily battles with the routine library work, classroom teaching work, research and publication demands,

management work, university committees assignment and teaching information literacy skills. He is also faced with professional bodies' responsibilities at state, national and international levels. Beyond this official sphere, the academic librarian has domestic and community responsibilities.

In order to accomplish the traditional library works, the academic librarian according to Prospects (2016) is involved in:

1. developing and managing collections of books and journals (both paper and electronic) as well as websites;
2. creating, updating and managing electronic and printed information resources;
3. selecting, acquiring and cataloguing information using library and information software;
4. assisting researchers with literature searches using databases, printed resources and the Internet;
5. managing and supporting the provision of reading lists and allocating length of loans;
6. dealing with user enquiries, which may involve one-on-one advice sessions;
7. dealing with budgets in relation to your allocated subject areas/departments and, in some cases, purchasing resources;
8. liaising with library colleagues on other campuses;
9. carrying out staff management, which may involve recruitment and selection, appraisals, support and development, disciplinary action, staff roaster and training, as well as allocating daily tasks;
10. maintaining relationships with external bodies, such as suppliers;
11. managing buildings, furniture and equipment;
12. keeping up to date with relevant professional developments in the library sector;
13. participating in professional groups or networks.
14. establishing and maintaining effective working relationships with academic staff and students;
15. contributing to academic course development and liaising with academic departments;

Classroom teaching is another section where the academic librarian is assigned some courses in the Library and Information Science Department or from other related departments. This can be for undergraduates, CEP, or postgraduate levels. This entails preparing the lectures, teaching, examination supervision, marking of scripts and project supervision.

Academic librarians are also deeply involved in the furtherance of knowledge through research and publications of new findings. They are expected to keep abreast with evolving trends in ICT for readers' services. They are to learn, master and apply the new skills and also teach same to both staff and students at different levels of ICT application for information retrieval.

However, to meet up with this array of responsibilities, the academic librarian needs certain skills. Some of these prerequisite skills for academic librarianship as identified by the Chartered Institute of Library and Information Professionals (2014) are:

1. ability to provide support to library users
2. ability to promote, support and evaluate information resources in all formats
3. high levels of digital literacy and strong IT skills
4. ability to design and deliver information skills training via face-to-face sessions, written publications and e-learning

materials

5. ability to manage staff or projects
6. collection management
7. relevant professional experience in an academic library would be beneficial
8. experience and knowledge of delivering library services for the relevant subject areas would be beneficial
9. excellent written and verbal communication skills
10. ability to create and maintain effective relationships with colleagues at all levels.
11. ability to liaise effectively with academic staff and students to develop library services and support their needs.
12. organizational, planning and prioritization skills, including the ability to work to meet deadlines and adapt to changing circumstances.
13. critical appraisal skills.
14. knowledge and awareness of the academic environment within higher education.
15. a willingness to keep up to date with changes in the profession and technological advances.
16. It is in an attempt to meet up with these career demands that the academic librarian tends to be stressed.

Stressors/Stress Triggers

Stress can be caused by a variety of factors ranging from workplace to domestic affairs. Situations, activities, and relationships that cause 'trauma' to one's physical, emotional, or psychological self are called stressors(Rivera,2016). A stressor is an agent or stimulus that causes stress (Nordqvist, 2015). Individual differences in terms of attitude, perception and reactions to stressors determine what stresses the individual and the level of the effect on the body. Different bodies react to the same situation in different ways. But generally, stress can be triggered by what transpires in our workplace; conditions in the family; school activities; legal issues; financial imperatives; relationship turns; health/illnesses;environmental and living situations.

Signs and Symptoms of Stress

According to Nordqvist (2015), when we are stressed, the blood pressure rises, breathing becomes more rapid, digestive system slows down, heart rate (pulse) rises, immune system goes down, muscles become tense and we do not sleep (heightened state of alertness). These will then manifest in both physical mental or emotional signs. The physical signs arising from stress may include headache, migraine, fatigue, aches and pains(Olliff, 2009). Some other physical signs are weight gain/loss, unexpected hair loss, heart palpitations, high blood pressure, (Tomas Rivera Center, 2016). Emotionally, stressed out people feel depressed, anxious, frustrated, irritable and angry. They may also have difficulty focusing attention or making decisions(Alters and Schiff, 2009).These are typical signs that stressed out people manifest.

Stress Management

Different people try to cope with stress in different ways. Some can be healthy, while others can be unhealthy. Some of the unhealthy things we should not do in an attempt to overcome stress are:

a. smoking
b. drinking too much
c. eating junk or comfort food
d. spending hours in front of the television or computer
e. withdrawing from friends, family, and activities

f. using pills or drugs to relax
g. sleeping too much (or too small)
h. procrastinating
I. filling up every minute of the day to avoid facing problems
j. taking out your stress on others (lashing out, angry outbursts, and physical violence).

According to Robinson, Smith and Segal (2016), these coping strategies may temporarily reduce stress, but they cause more damage in the long run.

Healthier Ways To Manage Stress

The first step in healthy stress management is to identify our stressors, monitor our stress level and then decide to make stress management our on-going goal. Stress management demands our either changing the stressful situations or changing our reaction to the situations with the aim of getting stress always under our control. There are no 'one-fits-all' strategies for relieving stress. However, generally healthy ways to manage stress may include making changes in three basic areas of our lives: our thinking, our behavior and our lifestyle (Khan, 2010).

Changing Our Thinking

In-framing problems to avoid or lessen stress, we should adopt the technique of viewing situations from a positive perspective. Looking at things from the sunny side without necessarily loosing site of the reality of the issue on ground gives us a better chance of handling situations less stressfully.

Positive thinking- when faced with problems that overwhelm our resources, we should forget powerlessness, dejection, despair and failure and focus on our strength. We should rather learn from our immediate stressing conditions and look for opportunities (Khan, 2010).

Changing Our Behaviour

Being assertive- this gives us the confidence and assurance of being in control. It tends to remove the fear, anxiety and 'out of control' panic that trigger stress.

Being organized- disorganization is a major stress factor. Proper organization streamlines our activities and promotes greater achievement. Academic librarians should learn to plan their 'to-do-list' yearly, quarterly, monthly, weekly and daily to avoid domestic and professional chaos. Activities, objectives and duties should be prioritized in the plan in manageable and achievable portions.

Ventilating and engaging socially- "a problem shared is a problem halved" is an old cliché relevant to good stress management. Academic librarians should cultivate the habit of opening up to colleagues, friends, relations and networks. Challenges and difficulties are part of life and should be shared with loved ones for assistance. We should confide in trusted people. In this way we can benefit from other peoples experiences, ideas, advice and success stories, thereby reducing stress.

Closely related to this is engaging socially. Social engagement is the quickest, most efficient way to reign in stress and avoid over reacting to internal or external events that you perceive as threatening. There is nothing more calming to our nervous system than communicating with another human being who makes us feel safe and understood. It can also release hormones that reduce stress(Robinson, Smith and Segal, 2016). We should therefore reach out and build relationships and networks. The more lonely and isolated we are the greater our vulnerability to stress.

Being humorous - we should keep our sense of humor. This includes the ability to even laugh at yourself. The act of laughing helps your body fight stress in a number of ways, culminating in stress reduction.

Diversion and distraction – to manage stress, we should be conscious of and promptly run away from things and people that frustrate us. We should deliberately avoid sources of physical or mental trauma. Attention should be diverted from predictable stressors and distract our thinking from focusing on them. Robinson, Smith and Segal (2016) recommend we avoid people who stress us out. If someone consistently causes stress in your life, limit the amount of time you spend with that person, or end the relationship.

Changing our Lifestyle

In the view of Robinson, Smith and Segal (2016) our resistance to stress can be increased by adopting healthy lifestyle in the following areas:

Diet- We should make healthy diet as part of our lifestyle. Well-nourished bodies are better prepared to cope with stress. We should start our day right with breakfast, and keep our energy up and minds clear with balanced, nutritious meals throughout the day.

Smoking and Alcohol- avoiding alcohol, cigarettes, and drugs should be part of our lifestyle. Self-medicating with alcohol or drugs may provide an easy escape from stress, but the relief is only temporary. We should not avoid or mask the problems we have at hand, we should rather deal with our problems head on and with a clear mind.

Caffeine and Sugar- our caffeine and sugar intake should be reduced to the barest minimum. The temporary "highs" caffeine and sugar provide often end in a crash in mood and energy. By reducing the amount of coffee, soft drinks, chocolate, and sugar snacks in our diet, we'll feel more relaxed and sleep better.

Exercise- managing stress with regular exercise has been widely recommended. Once we are in the habit of being physically active, try to incorporate regular exercise into your daily schedule. Activities that are continuous and rhythmic require moving both your arms and your legs are especially effective at relieving stress. We may take on walking, running, swimming, dancing, cycling, tai chi, and aerobic.

Sleep- getting enough sleep is vital for stress reduction. Adequate sleep fuels our mind, as well as our body. Feeling tired will increase our stress because it may cause irrational thinking.

Leisure and Relaxation- we can reduce stress in our lives by nurturing ourselves. If we regularly make time for fun and relaxation, we will be in a better place to handle life's stressors. We should therefore set aside relaxation time by including rest and relaxation in our daily schedule and stick to it. Other obligations should not be allowed to encroach on our leisure time. This is the time to take a break from all responsibilities and "recharge our batteries". Make time every day for your favorite leisure activities. We should not get so caught up in the hustle and bustle of life that we forget to take care of our own needs. Nurturing ourselves is a necessity, not a luxury.

Spirituality

Another stress antidotes spiritual practices. Putting our faith to work by going to church, spending quiet time every day (prayer and meditation) and helping others, tend to calm the nerves and help us think positively. Again being thankful for what you have and living with an attitude of gratitude boosts mood and relieves stress (Olliffe, 2009). Another spiritual approach cardinal to resolving stress is the practice of forgiving.According to Niven (2007), forgiving ourselves and others is an essential part of stress management. The actions and words of others can be quiet hurting. These wounds can leave us with lasting feelings of anger, bitterness or even vengeance. As we dwell on hurtful events or situations, grudges filled with resentment, vengeance and hostility can take root. If you allow negative feelings to crowd out positive feelings, you might find yourself swallowed up by your own bitterness or sense of injustice and these inevitably breed bad stress. Therefore, letting go of grudges and bitterness can make way for happiness, health and peace. Forgiveness can lead to healthier relationships; greater spiritual and psychological well-being; less anxiety; stress and hostility; lower blood pressure; fewer symptoms of depression; stronger immune system and improved heart health, (Mayor Clinic Staff, 2014). As we forgive others we should also constantly forgive ourselves of our past lives and mistakes, utterances and blunders. According to Niven (2007), making the choice to forgive ourselves and others frees our minds and hearts and relieves stress in our lives. It is not helpful to turn on ourselves and become our own worst enemy when we make mistakes. Berating and beating ourselves up only creates added stress in an already stressful situation.

Recommendations

1. Academic libraries should provide relevant stress management and related literature and also endeavor to read them.
2. Unique promotion criteria for academic librarians should be put in place as none can serve two masters effectively. This will help the librarians make more input into their primary job than diverting most time and attention to teaching and supervision.
3. More ICT high level staff should be employed in Festus Aghagbo Nwako Library to reduce pressure on existing staff.
4. Appropriate continuing professional training and fellowship abroad for academic librarians should be a priority for optimal performance.
5. Planned break time for all staff to encourage midday rest (and naps) will be beneficial.
6. Central provision of water for easy access and availability is also advised.
7. Setting up of gymnasium in the library complex to be regulated and used by staff will also help in stress reduction.
8. Central provision of healthy snacks during seminars, meetings and other occasions and also for the library canteen will be beneficial.
9. Vital health checks like blood pressure, sugar and cholesterol levels should be conducted in the library at recommended intervals for early detection of stress-induced health problems

Conclusion

Certainly academic librarians have a disproportionate share of workload in a rapidly changing work environment, without

corresponding training and resources to match the changes. Stress then becomes inevitable according to individual perception. Stress may not however disappear from their life as stress management is not an overnight cure. Nonetheless, with ongoing practice and incorporation of resilience into our lifestyle, we can learn to manage our stress level and increase our ability to cope with life's challenges (Mayor Clinic Staff, 2014).

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