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OCCUPATIONAL STRESS AND EMPLOYEES PERFORMANCE. A CASE OF KENYA DISCIPLINED SERVICES

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ABSTRACT

Stress has a considerable negative impact on job performance. If not dealt with effectively, stress can have detrimental impact on staff and organizations performance. The aim of this study was to investigate the level of occupational stress among the employees of the Kenya disciplined services. The study target population comprised of all employees of NYS in all the six Nairobi Stations. Survey was carried out to identify their perceived job stressors and measure degree of impact of job related stress and organizations performance. The survey method was used to help determine the level of workplace stress of the staff and the impact on staff and organizations performance. Stratified random sampling was utilized in drawing a representative sample of 111 employees from a population of 557 for the study. Structured questionnaires administered by research assistant were the main data collection instrument for the research. The researcher used statistical package for Social Scientists (SPSS) data analysis program to help generate statistical analysis further. The study findings indicated that 50.5% of staff were exposed to stress arising from excessive work pressure. In conclusion, NYS staff were largely exposed to stress arising from quantitative and qualitative work overload working during odd hours, over enrolment of students in various courses, working under strict deadlines; inadequate reward system (pay/promotion/recognition);" unnecessary" and frequent transfers especially to hardship areas; inadequate tools and equipment, bullying by senior officers (harassment, degradation, humiliation, shame, intimidation, coercion and threats of transfers); unclear task definition, guidelines, scheduling and job definition; lack of training opportunities irrelevant training not matched to skill requirements; poor placements (role not matched to competence); poor working relation (lack of staff cooperation, arguments and quarrels); and unsupportive working environment from both co-worker and supervisors in that order. The study recommended that there was need for NYS to realign its vision, mission and long-term objective for the challenges of becoming a premier disciplined Service would be reflected on the quality of service delivery, corporate image, staff productivity and efficiency in service delivery. Achieving these organization performance indicators calls for among others a stress free working environment among staff and a comprehensive stress policy to monitor, manage and prevent work stress.

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INTRODUCTION

Job-related stress has emerged as a significant workplace problem in a number of countries around the world and it is increasingly becoming accepted as a workplace phenomenon negatively affecting a growing number of people and organizations (Cox et al, 2000). The experience of stress in organizations is today a widely acknowledged problem. (Astraschan, 1995). Stress does not only entail individual and societal problems but also implies a managerial and organizational problem since a great share of organizational resources and capabilities reside within individuals. "Job stress can be defined as the harmful physical and emotional responses that occur when the requirements of a job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker. Job stress can lead to poor health and even I injury. "[Stress at work (United States National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health), Cincinnati, 1999.]

It can be conceptualized as an interactive imbalance between the individual and the individuals work environment and the perceived ability to cope either the situation. This process will be influenced by the nature and the extent of the demands, he characteristic of the person, the social support available to the individuals and the constraints under which the coping process is taking place (Cox et al, 2000).

The emotional, cognitive, behavioral and physiological reaction to aversive and noxious aspects of work, work environments and work organizations. It is a state characterized by high levels of arousal and distress and often by feelings of not coping." [Guidance on work-related stress: Spice of life- or kiss of death, European Commission, Directorate- General for Employment and Social Affairs].

Stress "is the reaction people have due to excessive pressures or other types of demand placed on them." [Managing stress at work: Discussion document, United Kingdom Health and Safety commission, London, 1999.]

In the Kenya Disciplined services, officers operating under severe and chronic stress may well be at greater risk of error, accidents and over-reaction that can compromise their performance, jeopardize public safety and pose significant liability costs to the organization. However, disciple officers are rarely provided with effective stress management strategies to help alleviate these problems.

In disciplined organizations, officers with high job demands describe themselves as "working very fast" "working very hard" and not "having enough time to get the job done." Officers with little workplace control describe themselves as lacking the ability and/or authority to make decisions or impact on their job. The result of job stress is clearly detrimental to both organizational and individuals. In Kenya however, the economic costs of job stress, including absenteeism and lost productivity, are difficult to estimate but could be as high as several billion shillings per year.

There are several stressors in the Kenya Disciplined Services. Bullying, work or the fear of losing the job are all examples of stressors. Although work overload in Kenya and specifically in Kenya Disciplined Services is not necessarily as high as in the Western countries or Asia, nevertheless, stress at the workplace implicate farreaching consequences on officers and the organization.

In Kenya Disciplined Services, it is common for senior officers to command their juniors to use "initiative" whenever the latter are faced with challenging task which has deadlines yet the former do not issue any guidelines at all. This boards on of supportive supervision. Supportive supervision occurs when employees have high quality relationships with their supervisors. Supportive supervisors provide guidance and display confidence in their juniors. By effects of stress by helping officers focus the work at the hand and giving them confidence to perform their jobs. For instance, when work is moderate and positive related to performance, officers with high quality relationships with their supervisors should experience heightened motivation, task focus and performance. Conversely, supportive supervision will reduce the distracting nature of home stress, shift attention back to work and weaken the negative relationship between home stress and performance.

Work in the disciplined services is often regarded as an extreme stressful occupation, and officers typically suffer a variety of stress effects, trickling down on their ability to perform their duties effectively and satisfactorily (Rollin and Mike Atkinson,1999). It has also been argued in the management ranks of the different Kenya Disciplined Services that particular attention be given to occupational stress in Kenya Police, Administration Police and the NYS as its potential negative consequences affect society in more direct and critical ways than stress in most other occupations. Employee stress is there a significant bottom line issue that impacts on an organizations performance capacity. It cannot be ignored by any employer wishing to stay competitive in today marketplace as stress-free working environment creates a situation that is conductive for optimal work performance that in effect improves organizational performance. It was therefore desirable to survey the impact of work stress on the staff performance In the Kenya Disciplined Services and suggest a cost effective stress management strategy for the organizations.

RELATED LITERATURE

Features of Stress Free Working Environment

In an ideal situation the following features are prevalent:

Job Characteristics: *Designed jobs-* are designed to permit use of Skill and discretion by jobholder, incorporate sufficient task variety and challenge to maintain employee interest, ensure that tasks are sufficiently related to form a coherent job, and provide mechanism for giving early feedback on performance.

Designed work - Work is designed so as to allow the exercise to responsibility by the job-holders, provide sufficient authority to enable job-holders to carry out their responsibilities adequately, allow job-holders to share in decisions that affect their work, allow for learning opportunities through work, and ensure clear work goals and targets that do not conflict with those set for others

Work Relationships

Superiors develop participative management styles that allow for discussion for issues with appropriate and real delegation of authority; leaders pay attention to an individual's needs as well as those of the task and the group, and leaders are required to deal immediately with cases of bullying. sexual harassment, racist behavior etc.

Colleague/workmates accept fellow team members in a co-operative Spirit, team members support each other, and individuals are valued for their role.

Own staff (for managers and supervisors) - adequate training in handling staff is provided; immediate superiors are able to provide diplomatic support where necessary, and there is implementation of proper disciplinary procedures to cater for unco-operative or disruptive employees

Organization Structure

Hierarchy of jobs is reduced to the minimum (flatter structure) to permit wide use of skills, discretion and authority.

Communication Systems - These are designed to encourage communication between departments sections as well as vertically through he management chain, grievance procedures are rapid and discreet; and positive feedback is encouraged (by job results and staff appraisal).

Decision making process in the organization are delegated as far as is reasonable down the organization, people at every level are able to share in decisions affecting (a) their work and (b) their future prospects, and results of decisions affecting employees are notified as soon as possible.

Organization Culture

Attitudes towards employees are p0sitive, even when customers are regarded as the number one priority; where attention to product/service quality is paramount, this should reflect itself in respect for employee's

knowledge, skills and contribution, reasonable risk-taking is encouraged, and mistakes seen as learning opportunities rather than grounds for criticism, employees are regarded as the organization's best asset in meeting he wants and demands of customers and other external stakeholders, training, development and counseling opportunities are available for every employee, and conditions of employment (salaries, wages, holiday arrangements and shift-working) are fair (Cole, 1995).

Job Stress in Organization

Job stressor has been described by stress researchers as the condition or situation at work that requires an adaptive response of an employee. Bullying, work overload or the fear of losing the job are all examples of stressors. On the other hand, the potential reaction by an employee to a stressor is a job strain [Spector, 1996). The most common job stressors are: role ambiguity, workload and working hours, control, competition and business re-engineering work/home conflict and bullying.

According to Spector (1996) Job control is the extent to which employees are able to make own decisions about their work. This includes issues such as when, how, where to work and what tasks to do. Studies have found out that employee perceptions of control arc associated with job stress

High levels of control usually go and conform to a great degree of emotional distress, intent to quit the job, absence and turnover. This reflects negatively on the organization ability to perform and deliver services effectively.

Defrank and Ivanicevich (1998), argues that if an organization does not handle the implementation of transformation change programmes such as downsizing. cost reduction, delayering or outsourcing effectively, then increased distress can be the consequence. That could be because those changes are made without the involvement of the employees, who have to cope with the new circumstances without being briefed sufficiently prior to the implementation. In this setting, the role of employees becomes secondary to technology and competitiveness, which leads to frustration because of a feeling of being overburdened.

The effective management of diversity provides many advantages to organizations in terms of achieving synergy effects through creative inputs from different (cultural) backgrounds. Nonetheless, if diversity is not managed effectively it may lead to interpersonal stress, competition among different groups tor attention and resources, and decreased interaction because of the perceived need for political correctness in speech, interaction and recognition [Defrank and Ivanicevich, Aug 1998). Therefore "diversity stress" reflects the occurring feelings of ambiguity and uncertainty. They arise when an employee does not have the personal resources to both understand and to respond appropriately in a multicultural situation. The diversity stress often results from differences beliefs and values. Moreover, these kind of stress is often the direct of result of unfair behavior of managers and colleagues towards people of different gender, race, color or origin.

Work stress can also be based on conflict or tension with co-workers and supervisors and can involve arguments, nervousness, strain, and tension. Tepas and Price (2001) says that stress can be viewed as, "....an agent, circumstance, situation, or variable that disturbs the 'normal' functioning of an individual",

Defrank and Ivanicevich (998), view stress as an adaptive response, moderated by individual differences, that 15 a consequence of any action, situation or event that places special demands on a person. Cranewell-ward (1995), perceives work stress as an imbalance between the level of demand placed upon staff and their capability to meet those demands. This definition contains four important features: it refers to a reaction to a situation, not the Situation itself (the latter often called stressor), it emphasise the individual nature of stress, since the perception of stressors differs from person to person; it is "special", since only significant or unusual situations can be said to produce stress; and asserts the individual capability of coping with the amount of stress.

Stress pressure can result in eustress; 11 it 1s neither too much nor too high but just right for the employee. Corbridge and Pilbeam (1998), asserts that this optimal amount of stress placed upon an individual lead to a high performance of an individual as a consequence of feeling challenged but not overburdened.

Officers operating under severe and chronic stress may well be at greater risk of error, accidents and overreaction that can compromise their performance, jeopardize public safety and pose and significant liability costs to the organization (Rollin and Mike Atkinson 1999) Cooper (1998), Conceptualizes that changes and dynamisms n the nature of work imposes more pressures on employees. In order that staff may be happy., motivated, achieve expected results and perform exemplarily in their work, they must be fit for the work, not to do too much of it and must have a sense of it.

Galinsky et al (2001) asserts that women feel more job stress than men. While men work longer hours, take less vacation time, and tend to have jobs with characteristics leading to more stress, women report having more demanding jobs. They are interrupted more frequently while working8 and have too many tasks to do at the same time.

Cox et al (2000) Identity ten stressful characteristics of work, which are divided into two groups: "content of work" and "context of work". "Content of work" refers to the following classes of stressors, work-environment and work equipment; task design, workload/work-pace and work schedule. "Context of work" is made up of stressors such as organizational culture and function, role in organizations, career development, decision latitude and control, homework interface, and interpersonal relationships at work. Interpersonal relationships encompass negative interactions with others in the workplace.

Other studies have shown that shift schedules that disrupt normal sleep patterns and social life, authoritarian management styles, poor interpersonal relationships with supervisors, interdepartmental politics, lack of adequate planning and resources, lack of promotion and transfer opportunities, excessive paperwork, lack of autonomy in performing duties and lack or recognition tor work accomplishments are among the organizational stressors faced by members of the disciplined services (Brown and Campbell, 1994).

Doby and Caplan (1995) holds the view that excessive levels of work stress often result from

inadequate feedback regarding performance, lack of training, lack of control, and lack of meaningfulness or knowledge of how the individual contributes to the organization's goals. Guppy and Rick (1996) conceptualized that stress can be caused by work overload, under employment, role conflict, and role ambiguity.

STUDY FINDINGS

The table below indicates that majority of staff in NYS institute of business studies experience the lowest working pressure [49.3%] followed by NYS headquarters [56.1%] while staff in NYS driving school experience the highest working pressure [97%].the point to the fact that NYS driving school could be understaffed compared to NYS institute of business studies and NYS headquarters.

Table 1: Work Pressure

	X ² value	df	X ² significance[2-tailed]
Work pressure	23.65	10	.009
High qualitative work overload	22.21	10	.014
Supervisors competence and ethics	32.60	10	.000
Poor working relationship with supervisors	18.85	10	.042
-frequent run-ins			

Further the table bellow indicated that majority of staff in Nairobi holding unit experience the highest levels [52.3%] of frequent qualitative work overload while staff in mechanical and transport branch experience

relatively lower [11.4%] level of qualitative overload. Staff at NYS institute of business studies however rarely [99%] experience high levels of qualitative overload. The implication is that staff working at NYS institute of business studies has been well placed in their jobs and role have been matched with skill, knowledge and experienced. However majority of staff at Nairobi holding unit have not been rightly placed.

Table 2: Staff Work Pressure

	Staff work pressure		
	Most frequently &	Rarey	
	frequently		
Nys driving school	97%	3%	
Mechanical and transport branch	89%	11%	
Engineering institute	89%	11%	
Nairobi holding unit	77.5%	22.5%	
Nys headquarters	56.1%	43.9%	
Nys institute of business studies	49.3%	50.7%	

The Table below also showed that 53.1% of staff at NYS driving school and 49.8% at Nairobi holding unit experience or view their immediate supervisors as frequently incompetent, unethical, nonstrategic, unapproachable and unfair while 25% at NYS institute of business studies hold the same view . All staff in engineering institute however holds the otherwise view .the implication of the findings is that supervisors at engineering institute are viewed as competent by their immediate workmates in comparison to the other stations.

Table 3: Staff Views

	Most frequently &frequently	Rarely
Nairobi holding unit	52.3%	47.7%
Nys driving school	53.2%	46.8%
Nys headquarters	22.6%	77.8%
Engineering institute	22.2%	77.8%
Mechanical and transport branch	11.4%	88.6%

Further bellow indicated that 62.8%, 61.4%,46.7%,33.5% of the staff respectively at NYS institute of business studies, NYS driving school, Nairobi holding unit and mechanical and transport branch tend to have frequent ruin-ins with their supervisors this is likely to impact negatively on the organization ability deliver services. Staff frequent run-ins supervisors at engineering institute are however experienced by the lowest [17.4%] of the staff.

Table 4: Types of Staff

	Most frequently & frequently	Rarely
Nys driving school	53.1%	46.9%
Nairobi holding unit	49.8%	50.2%
Mechanical and transport branches	33.3%	66.7%
Nys institute of business studies	25%	75%
Nys headquarters	15.9%	84.1%
Engineering institute	-	100%

Lastly the table below indicated that 73.9%, 41%, 38.5%%, 12.7%, 6.8% of the staff at Mechanical and Transport Branch, Nairobi Holding Unit, NYS Driving School, NYS Engineering Institute and NYS Headquarters respectively have been over promoted and not really competent to deliver the Current responsibilities. This trend reflects on promotion done without consideration to merit and fairness and poses

the danger of increased stress, as staff competences to deliver responsibilities are inadequate. Over promotion at NYS Institute of Business Studies however is rare.

Table 5: Staff and Branches

	I tend to have frequent run-ins with my supervisor		
	Most frequently &frequently	Rarely	
Nys institute of business studies	62.8%	37.2%	
Nys driving school	46.7%	38.6%	
Nairobi holding unit	46.7%	53.3%	
Mechanical and transport branch	33.5%	66.5%	
Nys headquarters	29.6%	70.4%	
Engineering institute	17.4%	82.6%	

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

Overall low staffing levels in the Service indicate that staff are more likely to experience stress arising from high level of working hours thus with a high quantitative workload. Good communication process in the Service points to a system that fosters interdepartmental and vertical communication. Positive feedback is encouraged through staff appraisal systems for this ensures that staff are sure about their performance thus reducing any chances of stress arising thereon. The study concludes that NYS staff are largely exposed to stress arising from quantitative and qualitative work overload (working during odd hours, over-enrolment of students in various courses, working under strict deadline); inadequate reward system (pay/ promotion/ recognition); "unnecessary" and frequent transfers especially to hardship areas; inadequate tools and equipment; bullying by seniors (harassment, degradation, humiliation, shame, intimidation, coercion and threats of transfers); unclear task definition, guidelines, scheduling and job definition; lack of training opportunities/ irrelevant training not matched to skill requirements; poor placement (role not matched to competence); poor working relation (lack of staff cooperation, arguments and quarrels); and unsupportive working environment from both co-workers and supervisors in that order. The study therefore recommends NYS should uphold its integrity and aim at achieving its mission and objectives thus realizing its goal as of becoming a premier disciplined service reflected on the quality of service delivery, corporate image, staff productivity and efficiency in service delivery. Achieving these organization performance indicators calls for, among others, a stress free working environment among staff. This calls for a comprehensive stress policy to monitor, manage and prevent work stress. The study also recommends that a further study should be carried out in other areas besides level of occupational stress but something that can also bring out empirical information on how the Disciplined Services performance is affected

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