

**Case Study****Stress management techniques among female academic staff to overcome occupational stress at universities in Khartoum state**Maha Abdul-Moniem Mohammed El-Amin^{1*}, Purna Singh A²¹Assistant Professor, College of Education, King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa-Saudi Arabia²Assistant Professor, College of Medicine King Faisal University, Al-Ahsa-Saudi Arabia**ARTICLE INFO:****Article history:**

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ABSTRACT**Introduction:** The present study was aimed to observe stress management techniques among female academic staff to overcome occupational stress at universities in Khartoum state.**Materials and methods:** The sampling frame for the study comprised of 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. Individual strategies and University strategies scales were used to collect data. **Results:** There was no significant correlation between occupational stresses with individual or university strategies that female academic staffs utilize at universities in Khartoum state. Individual and university strategies that female academic staff utilizes decreases burnout especially in the emotional exhaustion dimension. **Conclusion:** We recommend to the management of both public and private universities should offer, develop, enhance, and encourage female academic staff to utilize stress management techniques so as to lessen burnout, thus, reducing its costs to them.**1. Introduction**

Occupational stress, is an unpleasant emotional state that arises from the perceived uncertainty that a person can meet the demands of the job[1]. The operational definition for occupational stress is the response of the individual female academic staff measured by the statements of scale of occupational stress adopted from Gumaa Said Yousif. Stress management refers to any program that reduces stress by helping people understand the stress response, recognize stressors, and to use coping techniques to minimize the negative impact of stress[2]. The operational definition of stress management is measured by the degrees attained by the individual female academic staff in the statements of both the scales of individual and university strategies. Recently, researchers have found out that many organizations and institutions have identified stress at work and its costs to them. According to Ivancevich and Matteson[3], due to the passage of the Occupational Safety and Health Act (OSHA) in 1970, some of the stress experienced by workers has been reduced, because of employers increased acceptance of OSHA regulations and unions support of the act. However, problems still exist and management is being held responsible by the courts for stress that is related to physical and general work environment with a growing number of Jury compensation awards. In 1990, workers claiming job-related stress problems were paid \$380 million and employees turning to workers' compensation boards and courts to recover damages, suffered because of job-related stress, are winning courts. As workers' compensation laws are becoming more liberal in their definition of what constitutes an "injury" and as the link

between stress and various physical and mental health problems become better understood, more and more companies are finding themselves being held liable for employee stress. It was claimed that the human cost, stress-related illness, and injuries in the workplace lay a tremendous financial burden on companies, which impairs not only their productivity but also profitability[4].

Stress management is the most effective way to avoid problems and to learn a number of skills that is intended to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with psychological stress, with stress defined as a physiological response to an internal or external stimulus. In general, coping means dealing with a situation. For a psychologist, however, coping is the process by which a person takes some action to manage, master, tolerate, or reduce environmental and internal demands that cause or might cause stress and that will tax the individual's inner resources[5]. Positive coping strategies or techniques are those that prove effective in satisfactorily dealing with stress, based on accomplishment of a peaceful resolution. On the other hand, negative coping strategies, provide no enlightened resolution, instead, they can create problems such as avoidance or inhibition of action, victimization, emotional immobility (worrying), hostile aggression and self-destructive addictive behaviors like drinking, drugs and overeating[6]. Stress management, consists primarily of finding balance in peoples' lives[7]. The present study was aimed to observe stress management techniques among female academic staff to

overcome occupational stress at universities in Khartoum state.

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2. Materials and methods

2.1 Participants

The sampling frame for the study comprised 1523 full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities at Khartoum State. The population of the study comprises full-time female academic staff working at both public and private universities in Khartoum state. Nine universities were willing to participate by submitting the necessary information needed for this study these include the following universities:- Khartoum University, Sudan University for technology and science, El-Nileen University, Omdurman Islamic University, Al-Zaiem Al Azhari University, Ahfad University for Women, El-Ticana University for Technology, Omdurman Ahlia University and Al-Ribat University. The sources of the data supplied differed from one university to another. Some universities submitted their annual book, or data in the form of up-dated sheets. Others advised to use the university updated website. The data for each university was sorted concentrating only on female academic staff. For the purpose of the study, the female academic staffs were classified according to where they work, i.e. in governmental or non-governmental universities. Further classifications were done of both the governmental and non-governmental universities into theoretical and applied colleges to ensure the accuracy of counting female academic staff. From the data supplied, all the faculties of the theoretical colleges of each governmental and non-governmental university were grouped and the numbers of females counted. The same was done with the applied colleges of the governmental and the non-governmental universities. The sampling frame was stratified into enumeration units based on the formula used according to theoretical and applied colleges within both the governmental and the non-governmental universities. A pilot study was conducted and then the researcher selected the participants according to the final number stated for each faculty and with the help and permission of the Dean of the faculty and staff members, the questionnaires were administered to the (306) anonymous female academic staff over a period of two and half month. Female academic staffs were notified of the study and its potential benefits to them.

2.2 Individual strategies and University strategies scales

Stress management techniques; whether they are individual strategies or university strategies are intend to equip a person with effective coping mechanisms for dealing with stress. Stress management is more effective when a person utilizes strategies to cope with or to alter stressful situations. In her search for the most used stress management techniques, the researcher was able to list the techniques into strategies of (30) items. For the individual strategies scale (15) statements and for the university strategies scale (15) statements.

2.3 Statistical analysis

The study processed in two stages which used the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS): Stage (1): the researcher applied the following statistical tests to analyze the data of the pilot study: Pearson’s Coefficient of correlation and

Cronbach’s Alpha. Stage (2): the researcher applied the following statistical tests to analyze the data of the study sample: Frequencies and Percentages, Pearson’s Coefficient of correlation, One-way analysis of variance (ANOVA), Post-hoc test (Tukey Test) which shows the difference between groups, T-test.

3. Results

Table No. 1: shows the correlation between occupational stress and stress management techniques among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state.

Stress management Techniques	Correlation with occupational stress	Significant	Conclusion
Individual Strategies	-0.067	0.123	There is no significant correlation
University Strategies	-0.091	0.056	There is no significant correlation

The finding of shows that there is no significant correlation between occupational stress and stress management techniques (individual or university level), that female academic staff may utilize in order to lower the stress related to their profession.

Table No. 2: shows the correlation between burnout and stress management techniques among female academic staff at universities in Khartoum state.

Burnout Dimensions	Correlation with individual strategies	Correlation with university strategies
Emotional Exhaustion	-0.101*	-0.252**
Depersonalization Low accomplishment	-0.081	-0.077
Total Burn-out	0.007	0.0640
	-0.091	-0.173**

* The value of correlation is significant at 0.05

** The value of correlation is significant at 0.01

The finding of this hypothesis shows that there is a statistical significant negative correlation between individual and University strategies and burnout specifically in the emotional exhaustion dimension. The finding that there is a negative correlation means that female academic staff utilize individual and university strategies to decrease their burnout, and it is reflected in the emotional exhaustion dimension, whereas, the emotional exhaustion is considered as the key component of burnout.

4. Discussion

There is no significant correlation between occupational stress and stress management techniques (individual or university level), that female academic staff may utilize in order to lower the stress related to their profession. The finding of this hypothesis disagrees with the study of Najat Zaki and Madiha Osman (1998), which found that methods of dealing with

problems correlated with psychological stress. Stress management techniques whether they are individual or University strategies are intended to equip individuals with strategies that reduce or lessen work-related stress, they are not intended to eliminate stress because life without stress will not be challenging. The researcher believes that work-related stress is becoming an increasing issue and that most people spend more time at work than they do in other activities. Most working people are exposed to various and enormous sources of occupational stresses. From the researcher point of view she suggests that not finding a significant correlation between stress management techniques and occupational stress among female academic staff is not because they are not stressed from their work or because they are unaware of the stress management coping techniques; but because they exhibit individual stress moderators that act as buffers such as experience, perception, personality and social support. The researcher has noticed that according to the personal characteristics of this sample, the majority 65.7% of female academic staff have years of working experience that range from 7 years and above, while those less than 7 years are only 34.3%. This suggests that, the more years of experience female academic staff have on the job, the more likely that they are well equipped with techniques to lessen or reduce the stress related to their work. In addition, the researcher thinks that most of female academic staff exhibits a personality that enables the majority to stay for many years in the teaching profession. Moreover, as highly educated females, they have certainly developed their own perceptions about stressors in their work that increases stress, therefore, they have developed their own techniques to adapt and cope with stress at work. Furthermore, the researcher is certain that female academic staff have developed their own social support network, whether inside or outside their work, as have been mentioned by the study of Chen,[8], which found that among the various sources of social support was the support of colleagues and husbands that appeared to reduce teachers negative attitudes towards students. Similarly, other study found that perceived job related control and family social support were significantly associated with decreasing psychological strain. Likewise, the study of McGowan, et.al, (2006) found that challenge appraisal was associated with task focused coping, with eustress and with subjective experience; as well as the study of Gianakos (2000), which found that feminine individuals reported greater use of direct action coping methods. The researcher believes that perception of stressors related to the work is an important factor in increasing or decreasing occupational stress, because a stressor that maybe perceived by a female academic staff as a source of stress, may be perceived by another as a non-stressful source; and the same stressor may be perceived by that same female academic staff as harmless if it occurred in another situation or event. Therefore, a female academic staff's interpretation and appraisal of an event or a situation influences the coping process utilized. According to the cognitive transactional model of stress cited in Huffman, et.al[9], the individual brings his or her own beliefs, abilities, and prior experience to the appraisal process, looks at the event itself, and gauges the interaction and the outcome between all the components; and then, an event is perceived as either stressful or challenging depending on the individual's appraisal. In addition to the perceptions of the female academic staff, is the relationships with the colleagues, friends, supervisors and the management;

as have been found by the study of Nelson, et.al, (2001), that teacher's occupational levels are lowered when they perceive that they have a strong relationship with their principle, are able to contribute to decisions, and have good relationship with their colleagues. Moreover, the researcher believes that a female academic staff's experience and unique personality determine whether she experiences stress at work or in any other situation.

There is a statistical significant negative correlation between individual and university strategies and burnout specifically in the emotional exhaustion dimension. The finding that there is a negative correlation means that female academic staff utilize individual and university strategies to decrease their burnout, and it is reflected in the emotional exhaustion dimension, whereas, the emotional exhaustion is considered as the key component of burnout. Researches and studies of burnout and occupational stress suggest that one of the main stress management techniques is social support, whether it is an administrative, colleague, friend, family, or partner support. Social support is the extent to which organization members feel their peers can be trusted, are interested in one another's welfare, respect one another, and have a genuine positive regard for one another. When social support is present, individuals feel that they are not alone having someone around them to care for them, as they face the more prevalent stressors[4]. The presence of co-workers may increase an individual's confidence allowing that person to cope more effectively with stress[2]. Social support is hypothesized to act as a buffer to moderate the relationship between job stressors and burnout. The finding of this hypothesis agrees with the study of Wiley (2000), which found that reduction strategies include job re-design, participative decision making, counseling services, realistic job previews, physical exercise, wellness programs, colleague support and so forth. In addition, this study agrees with the study of Chen (1995), which suggested that teachers must be involved in programs to reduce burnout. Moreover, this study agrees with the study of Najat Zaki and Madiha Osman (1998), which found that among the methods of dealing with psychological burnout where support, concentrate on solving problems, work hard and achievement, search for affiliation, tension and concern. Furthermore, the researcher strongly agrees with the study of Rieg, et.al (2007), which found that professors could assist the novice teachers by showing their concern towards them. As for pre-service teachers, university supervisors can provide feedback about pre- service teacher's performance and provide strategies that help to relieve stress. As for coping with stress, the pre-service teachers, stated that talking with family, friends, getting enough sleep, exercising ...etc reduces stress among them. As for novice teachers, many coping strategies were stated such as talking with colleagues, or an administrator, taking time for self, family, friends, and physical exercise and so on. Researches and studies also suggest that stress management techniques as means of coping with stressful situations consist of both cognitive and behavioral efforts. In addition, coping strategies fall into two categories; (1) emotion-focused coping and (2) problem-focused coping. According to the study of McGowan, et.al, (2006), emotion-focused coping was positively associated with distress and distress was negatively associated with subjective experience. The researcher strongly believes that stress management coping techniques at both individual and university level decreases burnout, thus, it lessen the financial

cost for the universities.

5. Conclusion

There is no significant correlation between occupational stresses with individual or university strategies that female academic staffs utilize at universities in Khartoum state. Individual and university strategies that female academic staff utilizes decreases burnout especially in the emotional exhaustion dimension. We recommend to the management of both public and private universities should offer, develop, enhance, and encourage female academic staff to utilize stress management techniques so as to lessen burnout, thus, reducing its costs to them.

Conflicts of interest: Nil

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