



Work Relations Stressors and Performance of Faculty: A Cross Sectional Survey in Private Universities in Kenya

Faith Kagwiria Mwenda*, Abraham Kiflemariam, Sarah W. Kimani

Faculty of Commerce, School of Business and Economics, The Catholic University of Eastern Africa, Nairobi, Kenya

Email: *fkmwenda@gmail.com

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Abstract

The objective of the study was to assess the relationship between work relations stressors and performance of faculty in private universities in Kenya. A cross sectional survey was carried out among six chartered private universities. A sample of 384 faculty members was generated from six universities. Data was collected between July and October 2018 by using a close ended questionnaire. Descriptive and inferential statistics were applied for data analysis. Results from the linear regression analysis revealed an inverse relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance, with a beta coefficient of -0.641 . R^2 of 0.409 signified that 40.9% variations in faculty performance were attributed to work relations stressors. Results from the descriptive results revealed poor relations between management and faculty due to poor communication and low involvement in decision making. This study has implications on policy makers and human resource professionals as they seek ways of addressing performance among faculty. Strategies for addressing the work relations stressors need to be developed and implemented. The study recommends further studies through a longitudinal survey due to the varying schedules of activities within the academic calendars in the universities.

Subject Areas

Higher Education, Human Resource Management

Keywords

Faculty, Performance, Work Relations, Stressors, Universities

1. Introduction

The environment of work is surrounded by many challenges which include oc-

occupational stressors. There are two broad categories of occupational stressors: physiological (or physical) stressors and psychological stressors. Physiological stressors are stressors that put a strain on the body, for example, injury, chronic illness, or pain. Psychological stressors on the other hand are social and physical environmental circumstances that challenge the adaptive capabilities and resources of an organism or an individual (Stinson, Bogin, & O'Rourke 2012 [1]; Thagard, 2007 [2]). Employees face several stressors in their working life and if not addressed may affect their productivity. Such stressors may be organization-oriented or job-oriented and may affect both individual and organizational performance. Occupational stressors may also have adverse effects on employees' mental and physical health and well-being. Work relationships among employees may be strained due to delayed or poor remuneration, unfairness in promotions, lack of career progression opportunities and lack of support among factors. As Rossi, Meurs and Perrewe (2016) [3] note, the social aspects of work and the social environment can be stressful among employees, since humans have a fundamental need to be appreciated and recognized by important others. Social resources, especially social support is necessary in a work environment (Tamunomiebi & Mezeh, 2021) [4]. However, such support may not be available, or it may be inappropriately delivered (Postiglione, & Jung, 2017) [5]. Consequently, work relations stressors may result in poor performance among employees.

Employees in the teaching profession and especially those in Higher Education (HE) face myriad of stressors (McIntyre, McIntyre, & Francis, 2017) [6]. Employee relations focuses on creating and delivering people practices which develop and maintain positive working relationships between an organization and its people (Boselie, 2014) [7]. Working relations is a key aspect in every organization and in the human resource profession. Additionally, work relations may be categorized into; relationships with colleagues, supervisors, management, workers at various levels and also extend to external stakeholders including clients. In the HE institutions, these relations extend to students who are the major stakeholders.

Staff in the higher education institutions are divided into academic (faculty) and non-academic (administrative) (Jansen-Schulz, Tantau, & Bertelsmann, 2018) [8]. The focus of this study was the faculty. The work relations for faculty were categorized into three; relations with management, relations with other faculty (colleagues) and relations with the students. Incidences of unrest among faculty due to poor work relations between the faculty and the management in the Kenyan universities have been witnessed severally. Consequently, the performance of faculty is affected.

The performance of faculty is considered critical in the socio-economic development of the society, besides contributing to the success of every university. However, low or poor faculty performance has been witnessed and reported in many universities. Reports of delayed and poor supervision of post graduate students are rampant (Mbogo *et al.*, 2020) [9]. Such delays impact graduation

rates and students' careers are negatively affected, notwithstanding the loss of requisite labor force in the labor market. Faculty performance in research and publishing is also low in many Kenyan universities (World Bank (2016) [10]; Mushemeza (2016) [11]; Mwiria, (2007) [12]; McCowan (2018) [13]). Similarly, low faculty performance has been noted from the online teaching with low or poor feedback to students, coupled with poor teaching and learning (Gopal *et al.*, 2021) [14]. The output from poor faculty performance can be noted from the student output, low graduation rates and ill prepared graduates churned into the labor market. Such may emanate from lack or inadequate student mentorship, poor or lack of academic advising, poor teaching and learning, poor relations between students and faculty or poor supervision by faculty among other causes.

Since faculty is major key players in the socio-economic development of the societies, their performance is critical. Therefore, factors that may affect their performance in any way should be investigated and addressed promptly. Several studies including, Matchen & DeSouza (2000) [15]; Mahiri & Orwa (2016) [16] and Edwards *et al.* (2007) [17] show that work relations stressors affect employees in different ways, including their performance. According to Postiglione & Jung (2017) [5], faculty's key performance indicators are research, teaching and service. Their performance therefore has global socio-economic and political impact. Due to the increased global challenges, the world requires a highly skilled workforce such as the faculty members in the HEI to address the challenges (Vaiciukevičiūtė *et al.*, 2019) [18]. Faculty performance through research and innovations results in global transformative changes. Besides, quality of services has become paramount in attracting and retaining students in the competitive atmosphere of higher education (Asim & Kumar, 2018) [19]. Indeed, faculty performance contributes to the global ranking of the universities.

This study, therefore, assessed the relationship between work relations stressors and performance of faculty in private universities in Kenya. Results of this study can help HR practitioners and policy makers such as regulators of HE in developing appropriate policies.

2. Data Collection Method and Research Instrument

The study design was a cross sectional survey carried out across selected private universities in Kenya with a correlational data analysis approach. It was framed on a quantitative paradigm.

2.1. Method

The research instrument was a structured close ended questionnaire that was developed by the researcher by borrowing from two stress tools namely, an organizational stress screening tool (ASSET) questionnaire (Faragher, Cooper & Cartwright 2004) [20] and Universities and Colleges Union and Universities and Colleges Union (UCU) model stress questionnaire developed by the Health and Safety Executive in the UK. The reliability and validity of the questionnaire were tested. Reliability was tested on each scale of the constructs. For reliability, the

overall Cronbach's α statistic attained was 0.947 which was greater than the threshold of 0.7 (Bryman & Bell, 2015) [21]. Construct validity was tested through the Bartlett's test of sphericity and Kaiser Meyer-Olkin (KMO). Results of the KMO scores exceeded 0.5 and the Bartlett's test of sphericity scores for all the variables were statistically significant at 0.05 confirming construct validity. The questionnaire had two sections, with Section (a) collecting the demographics of the respondents and Section (b) collecting data regarding the work relationship stressors and faculty performance. The researcher with the support of a research assistant, collected primary data across the selected private universities in Kenya from July to October 2018. The questionnaires were distributed both physically and online using the contacts provided by the Human resource managers and the Deans of Schools from the universities. The questionnaire was distributed to both full time and part time faculty. Participation was voluntary and participants were assured of confidentiality by ensuring their identity was not required and their responses were coded. The study was conducted under the ethical standards laid down by the Ethics Board of Kenya, from which the researcher received ethical clearance and approval. Ethical standards were observed during the whole process of the research. Authorization for conducting research was granted by the relevant institutions including National Commission of Research, Science and Innovation (NACOSTI-Kenya) and the various universities' authorities.

The sampling frame of this study was the list of all the (18) chartered private universities in Kenya.

2.2. Target Population and Sampling

The target population was full time and part time faculty members, in the selected private universities in Kenya. All chartered private universities who had a charter for fifteen years and above were used in the study. The Commission for university Education (CUE) in Kenya reviews the accreditation status of each university every five years. The researcher selected all the private universities that had been accredited for at least fifteen years. This meant that they had been re-accredited at least three times. From the sampling frame, six universities met the criteria; Africa Nazarene University (ANU), The Catholic University of Eastern Africa (CUEA), Daystar University (DU), Scott Christian University (SCU), United States International University (USIU-Africa) and University of Eastern Africa-Baraton (UEA). The total population from the selected universities was 949 faculty members.

Sampling Technique and Sample Size:

Fisher's formula was used to determine the appropriate sample size for this study (Lyn, 2004 [22]; Verma & Verma, 2021 [23]). The researcher assumed a 95% desired level of confidence, which was equivalent to standardized normal deviation value of 1.96 and an acceptable margin of error of 5% (standard value of 0.05).

Therefore, $n = Z^2 pq/d^2$

where:

Necessary Sample Size = $(Z - \text{score})^2 * \text{Std Dev} * (1 - \text{StdDev}) / (\text{margin of error})^2$

Using a 95% confidence level, 0.5 standard deviation, and a margin of error (confidence interval) of +/-5%.

By applying the Fishers formula, a sample size of 384 faculty members was generated.

Target sample size:

To determine the sample size for each university, the study used the allocation method recommended by Wright (2014).

$$n_h = \left(\frac{N_h}{N} \right) n$$

where, n_h

n_h —The sample size for stratum h ;

n —Total sample size;

N_h —The population size for stratum h ;

N —The total population.

By using the allocation method, the proportionate sample size per university was generated as follows: ANU (78), CUEA (48), DU (42), SCU (26), USIU-Africa (99) and UEA-Baraton (91). As shown in **Table 1** there was a total of 248 respondents (64.5%).

3. Data Analysis and Results

Data was analyzed through descriptive and inferential analysis.

3.1. Demographics

There were 384 participants, 248 of whom returned the fully completed questionnaire. Majority (61.7%) were male while 38.3% were female (**Table 2**). Faculty aged between 41 and 50 years were the majority (34.7), followed by those aged 31 - 40 years (29%) while the minority were above 70 years (0.4%) (**Table 3**). Results revealed that married faculty accounted for 77 % followed by 16.1% who were single (**Table 4**) In terms of tenure, majority were full time (54.4%) while 45.6% were employed on part time basis (**Table 5**). Faculty with master's degrees were the majority (52.5%), followed by faculty either pursuing/or had doctorate degrees 42.3% (**Table 6**).

3.2. Work-Relations Stressors

Work-relations stressors are factors that cause stress due to poor work relationships. Relationships among faculty have been broken down into three; relationship with management, relationship with colleagues and relationship with students (Perrewe & Ganster, 2010) [24]. Work relations stressors variable consisted of ten items (**Table 7**). Each item was rated on a five-point Likert type scale rated from 1 for "Not at all" (NAT), 2 for Little extent (LTE), 3 for moderate extent (ME), 4 for Large Extent (LE) and 5 for denoting "very large extent" (VLE).

Table 1. Proportionate number of respondents per university.

	University	Total no. of Faculty	Proportionate no. of Respondents
1.	ANU	193	78
2.	CUEA	118	48
3.	DU	104	42
4.	SCU	65	26
5.	USIU-Africa	245	99
6.	UEA-Baraton	224	91
	Total	949	384

Source: Adapted from CUE (2018).

Table 2. Gender of the respondents.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Male	153	61.7	61.7	61.7
Female	95	38.3	38.3	100.0
Total	248	100.0	100.0	

Table 3. Age of the respondents.

Age bracket	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
20 - 30 years	12	4.8	4.8	4.8
31 - 40 years	72	29	29	33.9
41 - 50 years	86	34.7	34.7	68.5
51 - 60 years	56	22.6	22.6	91.1
61 - 70 years	21	8.5	8.5	99.6
Above 70 years	1	0.4	0.4	100
Total	248	100	100	

Table 4. Marital status of the respondents.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Single	40	16.1	16.1	16.1
Married	192	77.4	77.4	93.5
Divorced	3	1.2	1.2	94.8
Separated	3	1.2	1.2	96.0
Widowed	10	4.0	4.0	100.0
Total	248	100.0	100.0	

Table 5. Job tenure.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Part-Time	113	45.6	45.6	45.6
Permanent and Pensionable	135	54.4	54.4	100.0
Total	248	100.0	100.0	

Table 6. Highest academic qualifications.

	Frequency	Percent	Valid Percent	Cumulative Percent
Bachelors	13	5.2	5.2	5.2
Masters	130	52.5	52.5	57.7
Doctorate	105	42.3	42.3	100.0
Total	248	100.0	100.0	

Table 7. Work relations stressors.

Variable	Relations	NAT (%)	LTE (%)	ME (%)	LE (%)	VLE (%)	Mean	Std. Deviation
Poor Communication	I feel stressed due to poor communication from management.	24	26	26	15	10	2.61	1.263
Decision Making	I normally feel stressed since the management does not encourage my participation in decision making.	26	30	24	12	8	2.46	1.228
Top management Support	I feel stressed due to lack of support from top management.	27	30	22	13	7	2.43	1.226
Recognition	Lack of recognition from the management stresses me.	34	27	19	11	9	2.34	1.290
Colleagues	My colleagues normally stress me.	56	30	9	5	1	1.67	.916
Isolation in profession	I normally feel isolated in my professional area and this causes me stress.	63	20	9	5	2	1.64	1.007
Colleagues' Support	Lack of support from colleagues stresses me.	57	24	13	4	1	1.67	.921
Harassment by students	I normally feel stressed due to harassment by students.	69	20	6	4	1	1.46	.832
Students' lack of interest	I normally feel stressed due to the students' lack of interest and commitment in their studies.	30	25	24	14	7	2.44	1.256
Students' Behaviour	Students' behavior stresses me.	30	31	21	11	6	2.31	1.193
composite mean and std deviation							2.1016	.69968

Inferential statistics (linear regression) were applied in data analysis. By application of linear regression, it was possible to assess whether there was a relationship between the independent variables (work relations stressors) and dependent variable (faculty performance). Data was tested at 95% confidence level.

Hypothesis

To assess the relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance, the following null hypothesis was formulated.

H₀₁: There is no statistically significant relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance.

Linear regression analysis was used to test the hypothesis (**Table 8**). Work relations among faculty were an aggregate of three components; relations with management, relationship with colleagues and relationship with students. Work relations were entered as the independent variable. Similarly, faculty performance was entered as the dependent variable.

Results revealed a beta coefficient of -0.641 ($p < 0.05$) and the model explained 40.9% variation.

The resultant predictive model was expressed as follows:

$$FP = 3.670 - 0.641WR + e, P < 0.05, R^2 = 40.9\%$$

where:

FP = faculty performance;

WR = Work relations stressors;

3.670 = y intercept; constant;

-0.641 = an estimate of the expected decrease in faculty performance corresponding to an increase in work relations stressors.

3.3. Faculty Performance

The dependent variable, faculty performance was an aggregate of three components: research, teaching and community service. The faculty performance composite scores were therefore an average of the composite mean scores of research, teaching and service which were: 2.9808, 4.2087 and 3.4871 respectively. Faculty performance recorded a mean score value (Mean = 3.5589, SD = 0.79516, $n = 248$). This indicates that the respondents rated moderately in faculty performance in the selected private universities in Kenya.

The descriptive analysis (**Table 7**) from the work relationships stressors showed that the average scale ratings ranged from 1.46 to 2.61. This indicated that the respondents exhibited low levels of stress emanating from work relations. The highest mean rating was 2.61 for the statement, "I feel stressed due to poor communication from management (SD = 1.263, $n = 248$)." The statement with the lowest mean rating of 1.46 was, "I normally feel stressed due to harassment by students (SD = 0.832, $n = 248$)." The composite average work relations stressors scale was 2.1016 (SD = **0.69968**) which was a low rating indicating that on average, the faculty had experienced low levels of stress emanating from work relations.

Table 8. Relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance.

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate		
1	0.640 ^a	0.409	0.407	0.53998		
a. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship stressors						
ANOVA ^a						
Model		Sum of Squares	Df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
	Regression	49.642	1	49.642	170.255	0.000 ^b
1	Residual	71.728	246	0.292		
	Total	121.370	247			
a. Dependent Variable: Faculty performance						
b. Predictors: (Constant), Relationship stressors						
Coefficients ^a						
Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients	t	Sig.
		B	Std. Error	Beta		
	(Constant)	3.670	0.109		33.749	0.000
1	Relationship stressors	-0.641	0.049	-0.640	-13.048	0.000
a. Dependent Variable: Faculty performance						

Poor communication from management was cited as the main stressor. This challenge in communication between managers and employees is also alluded to by Haines (2007) [25], who notes that there is a gap in communication between managers and employees in many organizations. The HE is not exempt from these experiences. Similarly, majority of the faculty expressed that the lack of support from management was stressful, with an average of 2.46. Likewise, lack of students' commitment and lack of interest in their studies was another main stressor among faculty, with a composite average of 2.44. The study revealed that work relations amongst colleagues were not a main stressor. However, a study by Matchen and DeSouza (2000) [15] showed that faculties, especially those in the lower levels were stressed mostly by relationships with colleagues. Human resource management encourages the promotion of collegial relations which should be supported at all levels of the higher education (Dicker, 2003) [26].

Results from the linear regression showed that the R-squared was 0.409 meaning that the work relations stressors were able to explain 40.9% variations in the faculty performance in private universities while the rest were explained by the error term. The F-statistic was 170.255 with a p-value of 0.0000 implying that the regression model was significant. A p value of less than 0.05 showed that there is a significant relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance. Therefore, the t-statistics and p-values were reliably used to test the significance of coefficients in the model.

The beta coefficient for work relations stressors was -0.641. This indicated

that a unit increase in work relations stressors would result in 64.1% decrease in faculty performance in private universities. The t-statistic and corresponding p-value were -13.048 and 0.000 respectively. Therefore, at $P < 0.05$ level of significance, the null hypothesis is rejected implying that work relations stressors have a significant influence on faculty performance in private universities.

Studies such as Matchen & DeSouza (2000) [15]; Banerjee & Mehta (2016) [27] note that work relations have an inverse relationship with employee performance. These studies further underscore that work relations not only affect employee performance but also organizational performance. Similar studies have shown that work relations negatively affect employee performance (Mahiri & Orwa, 2016 [16]; Edwards *et al.*, 2007 [17]).

4. Conclusion

Based on the results of the regression analysis, the study concluded that there was significant negative relationship between work relations stressors and faculty performance in private universities in Kenya. Therefore, poor work relations among the faculty and the management, colleagues and students negatively affect the faculty performance in the selected private universities in Kenya. From the descriptive analysis, it was evident that the poor work relations between the faculty and the management emerged from poor communication and lack of involvement in decision making.

5. Implications

The results of this study have significant practical implications for human resource managers, policy makers, educators, students and researchers. It also contributes to the literature by demonstrating that multiple work relations stressors have a negative effect on faculty's performance.

Results from this study imply that management and other policy makers should be conscious of the work relations stressors in the HEI. Strategies to improve the relationship between faculty and management are necessary. Mechanisms to improve communication as well as recognition of faculty need to be enhanced. Failure to address these challenges may result in decreased faculty performance. Consequently, the success of the universities would be at risk while the national and global socio-economic development would be negatively affected due to the critical role played by faculty. By providing the insight into the work-relations stressors and faculty performance, this study demonstrates a clear inverse relationship and reveals areas where faculty expectations are not met.

6. Recommendations

Best HR practices encourage good working relations for high productivity in organizations (Murray & Belanger, 2002) [28]. Therefore, HR managers and policy makers in the HE sector should provide an enabling environment where good

employee relations are upheld. To improve work relations between faculty and management, HR managers should develop strategies to improve communication. Supervisor support among employees is highly recommended. Similarly, relevant HR policies should be developed to address the challenge of unfairness in dealing with employee issues such as promotions and opportunities for career development.

Future research and policy initiatives can build on these findings to explore ways to address the work relations stressors in the HE sector, therefore improving performance of faculty.

Conflicts of Interest

The authors declare no conflicts of interest.

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