

## **THE EFFECTS OF WORK STRESS ON THE PSYCHOLOGICAL WELL-BEING OF ACADEMIC STAFF OF ISA MUSTAPHA AGWAI I POLYTECHNIC, LAFIA, NASARAWA STATE, NIGERIA**

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### **Abstract**

This paper examines the work stress and psychological well-being of the academic staff of Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic (IMAP) Lafia, Nasarawa State. The study was a mixed design where a survey questionnaire was administered to 348 lecturers and a Focus Group Discussion of two groups of participants. Data were analyzed using descriptive (frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient). The results revealed that components of work stress related significantly with the psychological well-being of academic staff, where it indicates workload as ( $r = 0.446$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), role ambiguity ( $r = 0.344$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), role conflict ( $r = 0.315$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), str.pc ( $r = 0.338$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), men.ex ( $r = 0.326$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). The qualitative findings show that the strain academic staff suffer at work workplace is due to heavy workload, role ambiguity, stringent promotion criteria, role conflict and mental exhaustion. It was concluded that there is a significant relationship between work stress components and the psychological well-being of IMAP. The researchers recommend that the polytechnic management should strategize and prioritise the lecturers' well-being by reducing their workload, motivating them and promoting a conducive, supportive workspace.

**Keywords:** Work Stress, Workload, Role Ambiguity, Mental Exhaustion, Role Conflict

### **Introduction**

Work is important to human beings because it gives them a sense of dedication and meaning to life, providing structure, promoting community cohesion and safety, increasing civic participation, and promoting social/economic development. It also gives human beings self-

identity and so it is the root of a meaningful life (Pojwan & Ojo, 2019). However, the need to acquire and accomplish more in very limited time provides a false sense of urgency leading to negative psychological changes in the individual and subjecting them to uncomfortable potentially harmful stress. Even though appropriate stress is a catalyst for self-growth and a motivation for people to progress actively, unmanaged stress causes problems, discomfort, and can lead to cardiovascular ill-health. A study by World Health Organization (WHO), (2022) affirmed that working an average of 55 hours or more each week increases an individual's risk of cardiovascular disease by 35 percent and even the risk of dying from heart disease by 17 percent compared to workers who work an average of 35- 40 hours per week. This is a sad reality of the psychological well-being of the contemporary employee (Omoniyi, 2013) with particular reference to the academic staff.

Work stress is an important current problem because of the rate of temporary incapacitation, cardiovascular diseases; absenteeism and early retirement of employees. The negative impact of work stress is not just alarming, but it affects the individual, family, industries, organizations and academic institutions, thereby making workers resort to medications to reduce the risks of continuous stress leading to huge sums of money lost annually as a result of decline in productivity associated with these variables (Dachollom, Gyang & Azi 2017).

Stress experienced by academics is a continuously developing global problem (Clunies-Ross, Little, and Kienhuis 2008), which affects lecturers' psychological performance and well-being (Kyriacou 2001; Duygulu *et al.*, 2013). Similarly, a teacher's psychological well-being influences the teacher's quality and students' learning motivation and achievement (Arens and Marin 2016; Klusmann *et al.*, 2008; Klusmann, Richter, and Lüdtke 2016; Shen *et al.*, 2015). This shows that teacher's psychological well-being is an important factor to support learning process and success.

The work life of lecturers in tertiary institutions particularly in Nigeria is not an easy one. This is because academic staff in Nigeria grapples daily with overcrowded classrooms, outdated laboratories and facilities for research, teaching, and poor work conditions among others (Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2016). There is intense pressure piled on lecturers to publish as many articles as possible in the shortest possible time for promotion purposes leading to the slogan of 'publish or you perish'. Ofoegbu and Nwadiani, (2006) identified sources of stress in Nigerian tertiary institutions to include; strenuous promotion criteria, heavy academic workloads, and frustrations in the efforts undertaken for articles to be published. These sources of stress impact extremely negatively on academic staff. Work stress therefore has a negative impact on the academic staff leading to emotional, physiological and physical ill-health and even on the students as stressed and stressed lecturers may be relatively impaired in the quality of teaching and commitment which leads to less knowledge, less passion, and less commitment to the students. The above scenario is of great concern to the academic industry and a significant concern to the higher education sector.

Although considerable research have been carried out on work stress and the well-being of workers, (Bolarinwa & Popola 2024; Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2016, 2018; Pojwan & Ojo 2020) the polytechnic sector is a relatively new focus of concern. Most of what is known about work stress is derived from the university sectors globally (Salimzadeh, Saroyan & Hall, 2017) and in Nigeria (Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2016, Omoniyi, 2013)). This study will therefore examine the independent variable of work stress on the dependable variable of

psychological well-being to fill in the gap in knowledge on work stress and the psychological well-being of the lecturers in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia (IMAP).

### **State of the Problem**

Academics, just like other helping and servicing professions are subjected to high levels of job-related stress (Pojwan & Ojo, 2019). Internationally and nationally, the academia has undergone fundamental changes over the last twenty years (Salimzadeh, Saroyan & Hall, 2017). Globalization, competition due to political and economic changes, eroded job security, and the ubiquity of information technology have changed employment in higher education as in other contexts (Kinman, 2014). Added to these changes are the varied demands of the academic profession, involving the simultaneous performance of disparate tasks including teaching, supervising, undertaking research, and providing other services like civil obligations and administration (Fisher, 1994; Kinman, 2014). Moreover, the increased demands for efficacy and accountability have put unprecedented levels of pressure on academia in general and academics in particular (Kinman, 2014; Salami, 2009). Similarly, observation has shown that stress is a growing problem in institutions nationally and globally. For instance, many academic staff have been reported to slumped and passed on in Nigerian tertiary institutions (Segun, 2020).

Most of what is known about work stress is derived from the university sectors globally (Salimzadeh, Saroyan & Hall, 2017) and in Nigeria (Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2016, Omoniyi, 2013)). This study will therefore examine the independent variable of work stress on the dependable variable of psychological well-being to fill in the gap in knowledge in the polytechnic on work stress and the psychological well-being of the lecturers in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia (IMAP). Because of the crucial roles academic staff play in manpower development in Nigeria, the need for this research is paramount to be able to explore more intervention strategies to assist lecturers cope with the unending demands in the work environment.

### **Aims of the Study**

The general objective of this study is to examine the influence of work stress on the psychological well-being of the academic staff of Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State. The specific objectives are as follows:

1. To investigate the effects of workload on the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State.
2. To determine the effects of role ambiguity on the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State.
3. To examine the implication of role conflict on the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State.
4. To ascertain how strenuous promotion criteria impact the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State.

5. To determine how emotional exhaustion affects the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia, Nasarawa State.

### **Research Questions**

The under-listed questions were raised to guide the study:

1. What are the effects of workload on the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia?
2. To what extent will role ambiguity influence the psychological well-being of the academic staff of Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia?
3. What are the effects of role conflict on the psychological well-being of academic staff at Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia?
4. Will strenuous promotion criteria affect the psychological well-being of academic staff in Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia?
5. How will emotional exhaustion affect the psychological well-being of academic staff at Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia?

### **Literature Review**

The work environment for lecturers provides a multiplicity of sources of stress. The concept of stress is of great importance in the academic setting with lecturers generally considered a high-risk group regarding work stress. It is important to note that when individuals feel stressed, their bodies respond by raising the concentration of stress hormones in the blood. Several factors have been found to contribute to the level of stress among university academics including: homework interface, role ambiguity and performance pressure; academic workload, student-related issues and role conflicts (Akbar & Akhter, 2011). Indeed, academic staff in Nigeria grapples daily with overcrowded classrooms, outdated laboratories and facilities for research and teaching, and poor work conditions among others (Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2016). There is intense pressure piled on lecturers to publish as many papers as possible in the shortest possible time for promotion purposes leading to the slogan of 'publish or you perish'. Ofoegbu and Nwadiani, (2006) pointed out that sources of stress in Nigerian tertiary institutions include; strenuous promotion criteria, heavy academic workloads, and frustrations in the efforts undertaken for articles to be published. These sources of stress are negatively affecting how academic staff function in their workspace. Omoniyi (2013) opined that although a high level of stress has been observed in teachers generally, the higher education sector is a relatively new focus of concern. This is because there is strong evidence that its workforce could represent a significantly vulnerable occupational group.

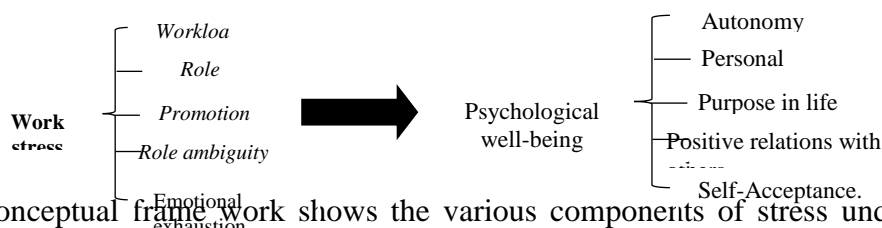
The above assertion was buttressed by Akinmayowa and Kadiri (2018) who revealed that unmanaged work stress due to workload and role conflicts leads to a great negative effect on the psychological well-being of workers. Also, Wang et al (2017) study also showed that components of work stress are major risk factors for the psychological well-being of workers which is major influenced by excess workload, role conflicts and sometimes work-life conflicts among other factors.

Many theoretical models abound on how work stress should be viewed. Five prominent approaches to the variables under study include: General Adaptation Syndrome, Person-Environment Fit Model, Transactional Model of Stress, Job Demand- Job Control Model and Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) model. However, this study will adopt the Effort-Reward Imbalance Model.

### ***The Effort-Reward Imbalance (ERI) Theory***

The Effort-Reward Imbalance by Siegrist in 1996 (Siegrist 2015) view work stress based on the notion that perceived intrinsic and extrinsic effort like motivation and commitment put into work should be reciprocated by adequate rewards (like money, esteem, job security and career opportunities. This means this theory is based on notion of justice exchange ( Siegrist, 1996), social reciprocity, a fundamental principle of transactions that are characterized by some form of utility which lies at the core of the work contract, defining distinct obligations in exchange for rewards(money, appreciation, career opportunities, promotion and job security. When this social exchange is not achieved, it can result into work stress among employees (Akanji, 2015).

### ***Diagrammatic illustration of the relationship between the variables***



The conceptual frame work shows the various components of stress under study. Each of these components impacts the psychological well-being of the employee if not well managed. Such worker will have or lack autonomy, personal growth, purpose in life, relation with others and self-acceptance.

## **Methodology**

### ***Design***

To increase the reliability of the findings, the researchers employed both the quantitative and the qualitative methods (triangulation). For the qualitative, a structured survey questionnaire was administered to purposely sample 348 lecturers of Isa Mustapha I Polytechnic, Lafia, analyzed using descriptive (frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test and Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient). The descriptive survey design was considered more appropriate because it afforded the researchers the benefit of gaining in-depth knowledge and understanding of the subject matter and the kind of data anticipated. Since the study is an ex post study, where the independent variable had occurred before the investigator arrived on board. This means there was no manipulation of the independent variable.

For the qualitative approach, a Focus Group Discussion of two groups (7 participants per group) of 14 academic staff was carried out. Semi-structured interviews were conducted with the 14 lecturers.

The target population was the entire academic staff of Isa Mustapha Agwai I Polytechnic, Lafia Nasarawa State who were 348 as provided by the salary unit of the polytechnic (57

female and 291 male). The population was purposively sampled because the population understudy is relatively small and it is optimal for qualitative inquiry by choosing participants based on their knowledge and or experience with specific areas of interest besides time and cost-effectiveness.

### ***Instruments***

A Self-Stress Assessment Questionnaire (SAQ) was constructed by the researchers for the study. The questionnaire consisted of sections A, B and C; the first section covered the bio data of the participants, while sections B and C were about the analytic data, where the instrument developed in line with the specific objectives of the study and the peculiarity of the setting of the study to answer the research questions. The Psychological Well-being scale which will be the C section was developed by Ryff, 1989 and it is a 42-item scale on a 6 scale which the researcher will modify with the assistance of experts to make it appropriate for the study. The self-developed instrument was given to experts for modification before a pilot study was conducted to validate the instrument for a pilot study with the staff of the College of Science and Technology (COAST), Lafia, Nasarawa State.

Nine Questions were generated for the Focus Group Discussions and given to experts for 'face validity' before conducting the discussion.

### ***Result and Data Analysis***

The data collected were analyzed using descriptive statistics (frequencies, percentage, mean and standard deviation) and inferential statistics (t-test) were employed to determine if there is any significant difference between the means of the two groups and how they are related. Pearson Product Moment Correlation Coefficient was used to compute and find out the relationship between the independent variable and the dependent variable. Although 348 questionnaires were administered, only 345 were retrieved and used for analysis.

Table 1

<b>Table1 Frequency and Percentages of the Characteristics of Participants</b>			
<b>Demographic data</b>		<b>Frequency</b>	<b>Percentages</b>
<b>Gender</b>	Male	290	65.7
	Female	55	34.3
	<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Age</b>	20-30 years	30	10.3
	31-40 years	81	35.1
	41-50 years	86	39.7
	51 years above	66	14.9
	<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Job Experience</b>	1-10 years	71	29.3
	11-24 years	144	59.5
	41-60 years	27	11.2
	<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Marital</b>	Single	117	48.3

<b>status</b>	Married	153	63.2
	Divorced/Separated	22	9.1
	Widowed	14	5.8
	<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100%</b>
<b>Academic Rank</b>	Chief lec.	34	23.0
	Principal Lec.	32	19.2
	SL	73	33.3
	LII	8	6.7
	LIII	20	14.1
	AL	9	9.7
	<b>Total</b>	<b>345</b>	<b>100%</b>

Table presents the frequency and percentages of the characteristics of 345 academic staff (290 males and 55 females). Age: 20-30 years (N= 25, 10.3%), 31-40 years (N= 85, 35.1%) 41-50 years (N= 96, 39.7%) and 51 years above (N= 36, 14.9%); Job experience: 1-10 years (N= 71, 29.3%), 11-24 years (N= 144, 59.5%) and 41-60 years (N= 27, 11.2%). Marital status: Single (N= 53, 21.9%), Married (N= 153, 63.2%), Divorced/separated (N= 22, 9.1%) and widowed (N= 14, 5.8%) and Academic Rank: chief lecturer(N= 28, 11.6%), principal lecturer (N= 32, 13.2%), SL (N= 83, 34.3%), LII (N= 56, 23.1%), LIII (N= 34, 14%) and Assist. Lecturer (N= 9, 3.7%).

Table 2:

T-table of work stress and psychological well-being of academic staff

Variables	N	mean	Std.	Df	t-cal	t-table
<b>Sex</b>						
Male	290	97.24	12.56	0.426	1.645	not significant
Female	55	100.34	71.35	0.426	1.645	not significant

The above table shows that the calculated t-value (t=0.426) is lower than the t-table value (t=1.645) at p<05 level of significance the components of work stress and psychological well-being is not significantly different, though the calculated means for male (97.24) and female lecturers (100.34) shows a slightly higher level of work stress among female.

**Table 3 correlates of components of Work stress on Psychological well- being (PWB)**

Variables	PWD	WI	Role.am	Role.con	Str.PC	Em.Ex
PWD	1					
Workload	0.446**	1				

Role.am	0.344**	0.623**	1				
Role.con	0.315**	0.564**	0.655**	1			
Str.PC	0.338**	0.632**	0.697**	0.729**	1		
Em.Ex	0.326**	0.594**	0.658**	0.674**	0.722**	1	
Sa	0.290**	0.665**	0.700**	0.675**	0.730**	0.607**	1
Mean	27.49	17.83	18.33	18.88	18.20	18.61	17.59
SD	8.005	4.456	4.102	4.442	4.562	4.302	4.493
N	343	343	343	343	343	343	343

\*\* Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed)

Table 3 shows the Pearson Product-Moment correlation results between/among variables. The results revealed that there is a significant influence of components of work stress on the psychological well-being of staff where it indicates workload as ( $r=0.446, P<0.05$ ), role ambiguity ( $r=0.344, P<0.05$ ), role conflict ( $r=0.315, P<0.05$ ), str.pc ( $r=0.338, P<0.05$ ), men.ex ( $r=0.326, P<0.05$ ). Also, the results show that there is a significant inter-correlation among the components of work stress indicates mostly strong correlation coefficient range between 0.290 to 0.730 and all the variables are correlated positively with one another. This indicates the absence of severe multi-collinearity since the correlation coefficients of all the variables are less than the reference point of 0.80 (Prodan, 2013). This implies that components of work stress influence the psychological well-being of academic staff of IMAP.

**Table 4**

**Components of work stress**

Variable stress components	mean	max	%
Lot of work to do with little time to do	64.12	71.28	87.35
Never take a leave	12.55	20.00	52.21
Goals at work very clear to me	24.54	28.02	57.00
Am emotionally drain	17.08	30.00	77.52
Confused at what to do	12.55	20.00	52.21
Promotion criteria burdens me	17.08	30.00	77.52
My job makes me nervous	17.63	23.50	43.72
My job a burden to me	15.64	28.00	63.00
What to do at work is clear to me	12.55	20.00	52.21
Multiple role demand	16.96	22.15	61.00
Inadequate of financial support for research	16.05	28.08	75.01
Overcrowded lecture rooms	14.72	23.40	53.15
Salary delay	12.55	20.00	52.21

The above table clearly shows that workload is the most common reasons for work stress in the institution (87.35%) followed by emotional exhaustion and promotion criteria which are



both 77.52% respectively. Also, 75.01% reported that they have inadequate financial support for research and 77.52% complained that promotion criteria burden them. Overcrowded lecture rooms (55.15%) were reported to be of concern as they induced stress and affected the psychological well-being of the participants. Delay salary payment was a concern for 52.21% of the participants with 61.00% reporting multiple role demand.

### **Focus Group Discussion**

Theme 1: workload and psychological well-being

‘I am always working; from classroom to research and examination invigilation without rest’ (participants 1, 2, 4, 6, 7)

‘So much work is affecting my family life’ (participant 3, 8)

‘The large classes I teach and many students I attend are stressing me out’ (participant 9)

Theme 2: role ambiguity and psychological well being

‘Most times, what I’m meant to do at work is not clear to me’ (participant 10)

Theme 3: role conflict and psychological well-being

‘I mostly have so much to do at the same time at work and such affects my health’ (participant 14)

Theme 4: strenuous promotion criteria

‘The promotion criteria burden to me so much, so many articles and publications for my promotion’ (participant 12)

‘Promotion is so expensive, with little or no research grants most time’ (participant 13)

Theme 5: emotional burden and exhaustion

‘I have fallen sick and taken medication most times after classes and students’ examination because of stress during invigilation’ (participants 4, 9 and 13)

Theme 6 psychological well-being

‘I suffer high levels of stress and anxiety at my work’

I feel like am burning out because I’m exhausted all the time (Participants 14, 6 and 7)

‘I’m always feeling stress and anxious about meeting deadlines and managing my workload’ (participants 1, 5, 9)

‘I have suffered prolonged physical, emotional, and mental exhaustion due to my work life without adequate motivation’ (participants 2, 5, 13)

‘I have been experiencing physical symptoms like headaches and other ill health due to stress’ (participant 4)

### **Discussion**

The research questions which were about the components of work stress and the psychological well-being of academic staff of IMAF were tested using Pearson Product-Moment Correlation and they were all confirmed. Where it indicates workload ( $r = 0.446$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), role ambiguity ( $r = 0.344$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), role conflict ( $r = 0.315$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ), strenuous promotion criteria ( $r = 0.338$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ) and mental exhaustion ( $r = 0.326$ ,  $P < 0.05$ ). Also, the results showed that there is a significant inter-correlation among the components of work stress indicating mostly strong correlation coefficient range between 0.290 to 0.730 and all the variables are correlated positively with one another. This indicates the absence of severe multicollinearity since the correlation coefficients of all the variables are less than the reference point of 0.80 (Prodan, 2013). This implies that work stress influences the psychological well-being of the academic staff of IMAF, Lafia. This is consistent with the

majority of previous comparable studies (Guliel & Tatrow, 1998; Akinmayowa & Kadiri, 2018; Achibong, Bassey, & Effiom 2010; Odor 2019) for example, the work of Akinmayowa (2009) buttressed that stress is not only detrimental to the individual's immediate emotional stability and behaviour but also long-term psychological well-being of the employees. Excessive stress at work could result in increased human errors and accidents, as well as negatively affect employees' productivity and their overall effectiveness on the job (Akinmayowa, 2009; Armstrong, 2006).

Theoretically, it has been postulated by the person-fit model that work stress undermines the well-being of any individual corroborating that person-environment fit is essentially critical for employee adjustment in the work setting, which as illustrated critical for psychological well-being (Dawis & Lofquist, 2014). This means that without a match between what people want and what they receive, as well as a match between their abilities demand them, will create strain and ultimately reduce the psychological well-being of such employees. The present finding however contradicts a minority of studies.

The findings of this study clearly highlight the need for polytechnic institutions to take proactive measures to reduce work-related stress among academic staff. This can be achieved by implementing effective stress management strategies, such as providing counselling services, promoting work-life balance, and encouraging open communication.

The mixed design showed that the quantitative data confirmed the positive correlation between work stress and psychological distress while the qualitative data provided insights into causes and consequences of work stress. The results clearly show that mental exhaustion and well-being of academic staff are pressing concerns that affect the performance of lecturers of the polytechnic and this is seen in the excessive workload, role conflict/ambiguity and pressure to publish for promotion. The qualitative data highlighted the importance of institutional support and proper resources in reducing work stress and promoting the psychological well-being of academic staff.

## **Conclusion**

This mixed-methods study provided a comprehensive understanding of the relationship between lecturer's work stress and their psychological well-being. The quantitative findings suggest that work stress is a significant predictor of psychological distress among lecturers and so, work-related stress should be of significant concern to both academic staff and the management and its impact on their psychological well-being should be ignored. Also, the qualitative data shows clearly the various themes related to work stress and psychological well-being like; workload, role ambiguity, role conflict, strenuous promotion criteria and mental exhaustion. It is important to note that chronic stress and exhaustion increases the risk of physical and mental health problems such as cardiovascular diseases. Therefore, the findings highlight the need for management of tertiary institutions prioritize the mental/physical health and psychological well-being of their academic staff by implementing effective and proactive stress management strategies, intervention and promoting a conducive healthy workspace environment for optimal productivity.

## **Recommendations**

Based on the findings of this study, the paper recommend as follows:

1. The polytechnic should address the issue of workload among lecturers by employing more lecturers to attend to the demands of students
2. The Polytechnic Management should pay attention to strategising and prioritising the holistic well-being of the academic staff for effective productivity by establishing Stress Assessment Centers for mental health services to the polytechnic community.
3. The staff should give more attention to balancing family-work responsibilities for healthier minds for better productivity at work and at the home front.
4. Training and seminars by the polytechnic and educational stakeholders should be done intermittently to educate the academic staff on the signs and symptoms of work stress and strategize how to handle the menace for the effective work environment.
5. Other appropriate intervention strategies like admitting students based on the policy of the regulatory body to reduce overcrowded lecture halls will minimize the menace of work stress.
6. Meeting the demands of the academic staff for their appropriate remuneration will minimize the dangers of work stress.
7. Future researchers should explore the effectiveness of institutional interventions in reducing work stress and promoting lecturer's well-being.

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