

## **JOB STRESS AND MEDICAL SOCIAL WORKERS PERFORMANCE IN NIGERIA: A CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORK**

**Yahaya Umar Namahe, Saidu Ibrahim Dandange**

Umaru Ali Shinkafi Polytechnic, Sokoto, [yunamahe@gmail.com](mailto:yunamahe@gmail.com)

**Kabiru Musa**

Shehu Shagari College of Education, Sokoto, Nigeria

### **ABSTRACT**

*Job stress has become a key area of research in recent times because it is considered as severe problem affecting medical social workers. This problem was said to be as a result of the growing competition, financial crisis, and recession of 2008 around the world. The paper, therefore, examines the causes of stress and the possible ways to manage it with particular reference to medical social worker's performance in Nigeria.*

**Keywords:** Job Stress, Medical Social Work, Performance

### **INTRODUCTION**

The concept of Stress originated from Physics, and it means the force placed on an object to cause its damage, bending or breaking, in the case of human being stress connotes the body reaction to the demands placed upon it, either favorable or unfavorable (Mansoor, Fida, Nasir, & Ahmad, 2011). Later the term came to be used in psychology and life science. Hans Selye was believed to be one of the founding fathers of the term in 1936. He defines Stress as the force, pressure or tension subjected upon an individual who resists these forces and attempts to uphold its real state (Dar, Akmal, Naseem, Ud, & Khan, 2011). Stress can be understood more comprehensively as, a condition which happens when one realizes the pressures on them or the requirements of a situation are more extensive than their recognition that they can handle (Bashir, 2010).

Stress is broadly classified into two, positive and negative. The positive stress is regarded to be helpful because it leads to increase performance, while negative stress is a direct opposite of the former. Stress whether positive or negative is said to be caused by so many factors which includes, perceived loss of job, security, lack of safety, family problem, lack of autonomy, lack of resources and equipment, complexity of repetitiveness, sitting long periods of time or heavy lifting, work schedules, workplace relationship etc. (Ongori&Agolla, 2008). Stress causes an imbalance in one's life because it leads to depression and thus damages health, attitude, and work behavior (Ali, Raheem, Nawaz, &Imamuddin, 2014). Furthermore, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health (NIOSH), designed a model that shows the relationship between job stress and health. The model listed factors that cause stress like, physical environment, role conflict, role ambiguity, job control, interpersonal conflict, employment opportunities, workload, responsibility for people, underutilization of abilities, cognitive demands and shift work. These have Negative impact on workers thereby leads decrease performance, and contribute to low



motivation and morale, high turnover, sick leave, accident, low job satisfaction, quality products, and services, poor internal communication and conflicts (Ongori&Agolla, 2008).

Job performance simply refers to the ability of a worker to complete give tasks set by the organization within a given period and resources allocated. It can also be the ability of individual successfully completing the task which is set by an organization, and according to the predetermined standards along with the efficient utilization of resources in changing the environment (Zafar, Ali, Hameed, Ilyas, &Younas, 2015). Workers Performance is a very vital issue that organizations, whether public or private, cannot afford to play with because it determines how such an organization can be able to compete with their counterparts. Researchers have suggested four possible relationships between stress and performance, i.e., when performance decreases with stress, Negative relationship have occurred, if stress leads to increase in performance than Positive relationship exists, when performance increase initially and later diminishes it is called Curvilinear relationship, and in some cases no relationship can be found between stress and performance (Manzoor, Awan, & Mariam, 2012).

Medical Social workers MSW, on the other hand, engaged in activities that cover the entire aspects of human life ranging from, social, economic, recreational, emotional settings as well as Healthcare (Hossain, 2005; Yellowiees, & Hardy, 2014). They lead people to a successful life because of their readiness to respond in emergency cases and disasters. Medical social workers are also at the forefront for providing needed assistance or help to every life of individual, group, or society (Riaz, &Sarfaraz, 2015). Medical social practitioners employed professional social work standards based on scientific understanding of skills in social relations. This involves knowledge of human development and conduct as well as economic, cultural, and social dynamics. In their attempt at making sustaining significant change to people and community, Social Workers applied varieties of techniques, skills, and actions. They play the roles of adviser, advocator and a counselor all with a view to assisting people in having a successful life in the society through helping them with a solution to their problems (Parast, &Allaii, 2014; Pawar, 2014; Riaz, &Sarfaraz, 2015).

Thus, this huge task carried out by medical social workers, made them to be more prone to stress as pointed out by Milliken, Clements and Tillman (2007) that, stress in the medical social workers is a product of so many factors like, critical nature their work, shortage of manpower, working double shifts, inadequate rest, working closely with deadly diseases and knowing that an accidental needle stick or body fluid splash can easily result in infection, watching people suffer and coping with family grief in the front lines of human need, seeing some co-workers permanently disabled because of on-the –back injuries, touching bathing, applying dressing and wound care to those who were indecent or rude ,providing physical care to those who are unclean, job layoffs, mergers, company failures, job insecurity, difficulties with co-workers, unfair evaluations, and potential for lawsuits.

Medical social workers in Nigeria are not isolated from this syndrome (stress). A study conducted by Anastas and McClain (2014) reveals that medical social workers in Nigeria face numerous challenges ranging from lack of funds to cater for the needs of poor patients.

Furthermore, due to the lack of enough personnel in some places, this has also led to the assigning too many tasks on the very few medical social workers, thereby creating work stress. Another problem faced by medical social workers in some settings is office accommodation. In these places, the institution operates in one single room which is not far enough as efficiency and effectiveness of their work. Again in some places, MSW is not fully motivated as there is no job career for them, they continue to work without further promotion and training (Riaz&Sarfaraz, 2015). All these factors contribute to the high level of stress; this leads to a decrease in their performance (Innocent, 2014).

### **PROBLEM STATEMENT**

The current global competition and the 2008 economic recession has forced organizations to embark on many strategies in order to be able to cope with the situation. These strategies range from layoffs, restructuring, downsizing, right-sizing, and mergers. This situation has given birth to conflict between workers and employers, which has also caused stress among workers (Manzoor Awan, & Mariam, 2012). Evidence from researches, observations, and investigations has revealed that workers in every sector (public, private, large or small) are undergoing a great deal of stress which consequently leads to deteriorating employees' health and decrease in performance.

Quite a lot of researches have been conducted on the impact of stress on job performance; different results were revealed. However, most of the studies conducted were based on different sectors. For example Textile, banking, institutions, cement industries (Manzoor et al., 2012, Bashir & Ramey 2011, Chag et al. 2009, Jamal M. 2011, Dar et al. 2011, Ongory et al. 2008, Ali et al. 2014). It seems that the medical social workers were neglected; a huge gap existed which need to cover. This study, therefore, intends to cover the gap that exists by examining the effects of stress on the performance of medical social workers in Nigeria. Again, the studies conducted mostly restricted themselves on some few variables. Example (workload, job ambiguity, work conflict). ( Bashir & Ramey 2010, monsoon, Awan and marram 2007, chag et al. 2009, Jamal, 2011, Dar et al. 2011, Ongori et al. 2008, Ali et al. 2014) It is, therefore, necessary to go the extra mile to adopt other variables in order to have a generalized result. The present study intends to use job stressors (remuneration, insecurity, and role conflicts).

### **LITERATURE REVIEW**

The concept of stress originated from physics, and it was first introduced by Selye in 1936. He defines stress as the force, pressure, or tension upon an individual who resists these forces and attempts to uphold its true state. The HSE (Health Safety Executive UK), defines stress as an undesirable response people have to tremendous or other types of demands placed upon them (Bashir, 2010). In the same vein, Stress has been defined by (Kar&Praharaj, 2013) as a lively circumstance in which people face constraints, opportunities, or loss of something they desire and for which the consequence is both unpredictable as well as crucial. Stress is the response of people to the unreasonable/excessive pressure or demands placed on them. Stress is also viewed

as a condition which happens when one realizes the pressure on them or requirement of situation are wider than they can handle, and if these requirements are huge and continue for a long period of time without any interval, mental, physical or behavioral problems may occur (Mansoor et al., 2011). Stress is also seen as the body's reaction to a change that requires a physical, mental, or emotional adjustment or response. Stress can come from any situation that makes you feel frustrated, angry, nervous, or anxious (Redman et al., 2012). In a simpler form, stress means any outside force or event that has an effect on our body or mind (Kar&Praharaj, 2013).

Scholars have tried to separate positive and negative stress. For example, Bashir (2010) belief that there is some stress that is good i.e., stress that leads to performance, he said some stress is bad i.e., stress that causes harm both to the individual worker and the organization. This idea what also noted by (Manzoor et al., 2012). She refers to the positive stress eustress, distress as negative stress. She maintained that Eustress is the form of stress that is positive and beneficial. We may feel challenged, but the sources of the stress are opportunities that are meaningful to us. Eustress helps provide us with energy and motivation to meet our responsibilities and achieve our goals. Distress is a continuous experience of feeling overwhelmed, oppressed, and behind in our responsibilities.

Job performance means the ability of an individual to complete a given task given to him by the organization within a given time and with the allocated resources. Zafar et al., (2015) see worker's performance as that situation which an individual successfully completes the tasks which are set by an organization according to the predetermined standards along with the efficient utilization of resources in a changing environment. In measuring work performance and job stress, four relationships were suggested. When performance diminishes with stress, a negative linear relationship is there. A positive linear relationship is also found when stress causes better performance. If stress initially improves productivity, and then it diminishes when feelings of distress prevail on the employee, then a curvilinear or u-shaped relationship is found. Sometimes, no certain relationship is found between stress and performance (Manzoor et al., 2012).

According to Peeters (2011) Social work is the occupation that is concerned with the way in which human beings are supported by their social environment, that is, the social nets and support systems that enable people to lead full and prosperous lives. This paper sees social work as the range of activities carried out by a group of people, which are geared toward the attainment of a successful life of people in the community.

Medical social work can be defined as a specialized area in social work that centers on the complete person, i.e. as a bio-psychosocial being, and the person's family, immediate environments and the larger social context, in an effort to develop the interaction with the environment as a source of resources to address the disparities that might have happened due to disease or disability. The social practitioners in this arena have to be trained to assist individuals to deal with their emotional, social, and environmental difficulties that are related to disease and disability <https://www.sacssp.co.za/Professionals/download/12>

**Remuneration;** This has to do with the pay package in an organization. It is amount pay for a particular service rendered by a worker. Workers tend to be stressed when they realize that their pay is far below what obtained elsewhere for a similar job.

**Role Conflict;** *This is a situation when* a person is exposed to contradictory demands by his supervisor or his subordinate; the person feels stress i.e.; it is a situation whereby a worker is confronted with too much demand either from his co-workers or his boss. It can also be an employer is given conflicting orders by his superiors.

**Job security;** This is another factor that causes stress. This occurred when a worker is not certain about his fate in an organization. The fear he has that he can be sacked at any time, thinking of where to start again, what is going to happen to the family, how will he feed them if he loses the job, all these can cause stress to the worker. Based on the objectives, this paper, therefore hypothesises that;

*H1. A negative relationship exists between remuneration and performance of medical social workers*

*H2. A negative relationship exists between job conflict and performance of medical social workers*

*H3. A negative relationship exists between job security and performance of medical social workers*

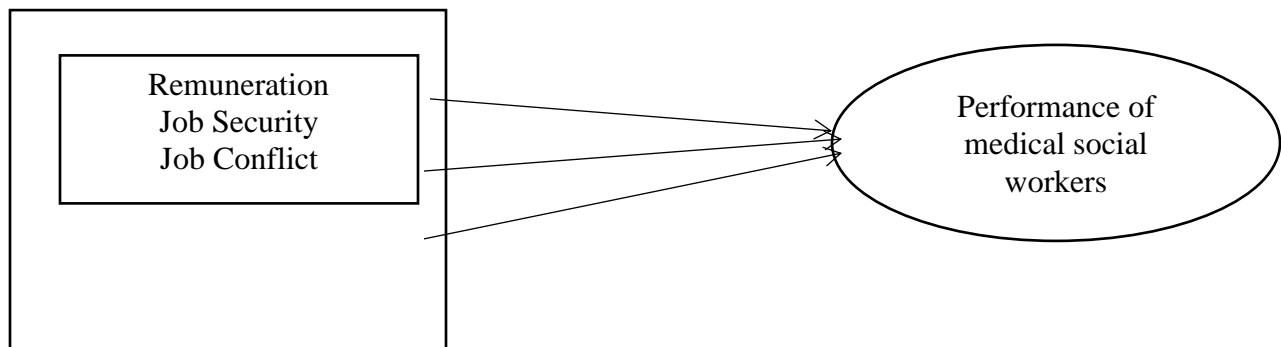


Figure 1.1 above provides a model of this paper. It indicates that the paper mainly focuses on three dimensions of independent variable Stress (Remuneration, Job security, and job conflict) and a dependent variable, which is the performance of MSW. What could be understood from the model is that, whenever organizations are ready to make available enough remuneration, job security and avoid job conflict, no doubt a high employee performance level of MSW will be attained. The model is made up of strong determinants of performance MSW.

**CONCLUSION**

This paper examines the effects of job stressors (remuneration, job security, and job conflict) on the performance of MSW in Nigeria. It argues that the persistent low performance faced by many medical social workers is due to the stress lack of enough remuneration, job security, and job

conflict), which this paper has attempted. The model has implications for organizations, managers, and other stakeholders. It is optimistic that, to enhance performance, organizations must consider the provisions of this model. This has become necessary because it contains the basic principles needed for gingering medical social workers to put in their best.

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