

AN EXPLORATION OF STRESS ON SERVICES DELIVERY AMONG EXECUTIVE OFFICERS IN PUBLIC SERVICE IN BAYELSA STATE, NIGERIA

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ABSTRACT

This paper sets to examine stress amongst executive officers in the public services of Bayelsa state Nigeria. The study adopted a qualitative research design using the phenomenological approach. The case study methodology was explored with semi structured interview to provide in-depth understanding of the subject under investigation in order to direct the research finding. The findings of the research revealed that physical working environment significantly direct service delivery of the executive officers, working relationships significantly shapes public service delivery of the executive officers and time constraints also significantly hamper public service delivery of the executive officers, thus slowing efficiency of executive officers and the following recommendations were advanced Government should improve working condition of executive officers by providing facilities such as catering and canteen services, gymnasium for exercise program at work, crèche facilities especially for single parents, adequate rest rooms to improve service deliveries. MDAs should create a culture for good working relationships amongst executive officers MDAs should introduce remote working, provide project management software and electronic time devices to enable executive officer to have time for balancing work and family life.

Keywords: *Stress, Executive officers, Public service, Service delivery.*

INTRODUCTION

Background of the Study

The public service is the engine room of government service delivery executive officers in public service in Nigeria play crucial roles in implementing government policies, managing public administration, and ensuring efficient service delivery. Their positions vary across ministries, departments, and agencies (MDAs), and they function under the civil service structure, which is hierarchical and regulated by schemes of service (Ezeani, 2006). As Ezeani (2006) emphasise Executive officers are responsible for a wide range of administrative and supervisory tasks in ministries, departments and agencies. (MDA) such as Supporting policy implementation, Administrative and operational supervision, Financial control and record management,

However, executive officers who are the custodians of files and policy implementation operate in a high demand environment characterised by bureaucracy, political interference and heavy work load. Grounded in the job/demand resource model, this study explores how these job demands, coupled with physical working environment, like working relationships. And time constraints generate occupational stress. Consequently, stressed executives exhibit reduced efficiency absenteeism and poor decision making, which ultimately compromises the quality of services delivery to the public.

There have been several literatures written on stress in several academic periodicals, but research on stress on executive officers in the public service in Bayelsa State is limited. It is on this premise that this paper aim to examine stress amongst executive offers in the public service of Bayelsa state Nigeria.

The rest of this paper is out to look at stress and its associated issues and the contributing factors of stress in the Bayelsa State Public Service, draw conclusion comment and contributions and highlight some recommendations for improvement to inform future research

Research Questions

- How do executive officers experience physical working conditions in relation to their service delivery?
- How do working relationships influence the daily experience of executive officers?
- How do time constraints shape service delivery practices among executive officers?

Overview Of Area Of Case Study

- Bayelsa State library: Bayelsa State Library offers free library services to the public, with a wide range of quality books and learning materials in stock. This place is ideal for students who wish to study during and after school hours. Researchers and journalists will also find this place suitable for gathering information, it serves as a readers' advisory library service that involves suggesting fiction and non-fiction title.
- Bayelsa State Pensions Board is primary responsible for regulating, supervising and administering retirement benefits for civil servants. It operates in line with the rules established by the National Pensions Commission (PenCom) to ensure transparent and prompt

payment of pensions and gratuities. Core functions of the board include: Benefit Administration, Pensioner Verification, Record Keeping, Liaison with labour Unions and implementation of pension schemes.

- Bayelsa State Transport Company: The Bayelsa State Transport Company is established by Bayelsa State Government as a fast, safe, efficient, and affordable intermodal transportation system that drives socio-economic development, enhances public welfare, and delivers sustainable, integrated mobility solutions for all residents.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

Conceptual Clarification

Stress is a mental or emotional strain or tension resulting from adverse demanding conditions and circumstances leading to role interruptions or distractions and disengagement from primary tasks (Peek, 2025). The World Health Organizations (WHO) also defines stress as a state of worry or mental tension caused by a difficult situation which is a natural human response to challenges and threats (Leka et al, 2003).

The mental well-being of employees is more difficult to define or protect. The total response of the body to any stimulus can be described as stress. Some stress is always evident in life and can be beneficial, like the stress that prompts an individual or group of people to devise creative solutions, like the saying goes, necessity is the mother of invention. But too much stress, also referred to as chronic stress has a negative impact on an individual's performance, and constitute a hindrance to the achievement of sett targets and objectives (Appleby, 1996).

Stress however, is not always negative in fact stress can bring about higher level of positive achievement by taking up a challenging job to meet up ones needs and desires combining work and studies to learn and develop. Joining a social club to meet the need for belongingness. Nevertheless, the extreme form of stress can lead to distress for instance if a loved one is sick, you feel the distress. When one is unable to meet up a new requirement in your place of work you become distress. Even the stress of driving to work in heavy traffic can cause negative stress. This requires one to achieve a balance between the distress in one's life and the ability to cope with it for one to be mentally and emotionally stable (Fulton-calkins & Stulz, 2009).

Stress can come as a result of lack of judicious use of time. Meeting time or working within the limits of time

Acute stress occurs when an individual must respond instantaneously to a crisis situation, requiring the helicopter factor/instinct. Chronic stress is when a distressful situation is prolonged with no rest for the body (Fulton-calkins & Stulz, 2009; Bernard, 1972).

Industrial and occupational psychologists working with HR, Union Representatives, Training Officers and Advisors have found out that chronic stress can lead to physical and emotional problems. (Friend & Kohn 4th ed; Porteous, 1997).

Other longer - term symptoms of chronic stress like coronary heart disease, stomach ulcers, and depression, are a gateway to reduced employee performance, increased sickness and early death (Cole, 1996).

There are a lot of conditions that tells that the life of the average working class Nigerian is very stressful, conditions such as: Attending to university certification programmes while going to work, assuming as a single parents with total responsibility for small children providing enough money to meet your family needs being a sole salary earner and facing discrimination and harassment in your place of work. No matter how competent and capable a worker the conditions mentioned above can lead to a situation where you encounter a workday when everything seems to fall apart in your hands consequently you become burnt-out, constantly worried and lacking in focus with dissipated energy and reduced creativity (Nagoski & Nagoski, 2019).

Factors contributing to workplace stress mentioned by (Fulton-calkins & Stulz, 2009; Davidson & Copper, 1982) are role ambiguity, job insecurity, physical working conditions, dual career families, single parenthood and extended families. Also included are anger, time, money and work relationships, of which the following are herein elaborated in line with the research questions of this paper.

Occupational Health: Concept and Dimensions

Occupational health refers to the physical, mental, and social well-being of employees in relation to work [WHO]. The World Health Organization defines it as the promotion and maintenance of the highest degree of physical, mental and social well-being of workers in all occupations [WHO]. Unlike “occupational safety” which focuses on accident prevention, occupational health covers chronic conditions, stress, burnout, and work-related illnesses that reduce employee capacity over time [Hasson et al., 2018].[2021]

Three key dimensions are relevant for Executive Officers:

1. Physical Health

This covers work-related musculoskeletal disorders, eye strain, fatigue, and illnesses caused by poor ergonomics, noise, ventilation, and lighting. For public officers who sit for long hours processing files, poor chairs and inadequate ventilation have been linked to chronic back pain and headaches [Olawale & Musa, 2020]. Physical ill-health directly reduces stamina needed for long working hours in MDAs.[Eurofound][2023]

2. Mental/Psychological Health

This includes stress, anxiety, depression, and burnout resulting from job demands [Bakker & Demerouti, 2007]. Mental health problems are the leading cause of absenteeism in public service globally [OECD]. Among Nigerian civil servants, emotional exhaustion has been identified as a major occupational health issue due to workload and bureaucratic pressure [Akanji et al., 2022]. Poor mental health impairs concentration, decision-making, and patience with citizens.[2022]

3. Social/Behavioral Health

This dimension covers how work affects interpersonal relationships and coping behaviors [Cox et al., 2000]. Occupational stress often manifests as withdrawal from colleagues, increased conflict, irritability toward clients, and reduced teamwork [Jain & Nair, 2024]. For Executive Officers who must interface with the public daily, damaged social health leads directly to poor service delivery and complaints.

Occupational Stress

Occupational stress is a specific form of strain that occurs when job demands exceed the worker's perceived ability to cope, given available resources [Lazarus & Folkman, 1984]. The European Agency for Safety and Health at Work defines it as the harmful physical and emotional response that occurs when the requirements of the job do not match the capabilities, resources, or needs of the worker [Cox et al., 2000]. While occupational health is broad, occupational stress is the psychological and physiological process that damages health when work conditions are unfavourable.

The JD-R model predicts that service delivery deteriorates when job demands drain energy and when job resources are absent [Bakker & Demerouti, 2007]. This study will explore Executive Officers' narratives: "Because my office is hot and I have 50 files with 2-hour deadline, I now attend to citizens with irritation and make mistakes". Occupational stress becomes the lived bridge between working conditions and service delivery outcomes.

Service Delivery in Public Service:

Service delivery in public administration refers to the process through which government agencies provide tangible and intangible services to citizens and stakeholders [OECD]. Unlike private sector service driven by profit, public service delivery is guided by principles of equity, accountability, transparency, responsiveness, and citizen satisfaction [Bryson et al., 2014]. For Executive Officers in Bayelsa State MDAs, service delivery is the core mandate because they handle file movement, documentation, approvals, and direct interface with the public. From a qualitative lens, service delivery is not just about output numbers but about the experience of both the officer and the citizen during the process [Adeyemi & Adeoye, 2021].[2017]

Literature identifies 4 consistent dimensions used to assess service delivery by public officers: Responsiveness/Timeliness, Accuracy and Reliability, Courtesy and Empathy/Interpersonal Conduct, Quality of Decision-Making and Problem-Solving

Executive Officers make routine administrative decisions on file notes, recommendations, and approvals. Quality decisions require cognitive energy, attention to detail, and judgment [Bakker & Demerouti, 2007]. Mental exhaustion from poor physical conditions and workload reduces cognitive capacity, leading officers to make inconsistent decisions, delay decisions, or avoid complex cases altogether. This slows down the entire bureaucratic process and affects policy implementation.

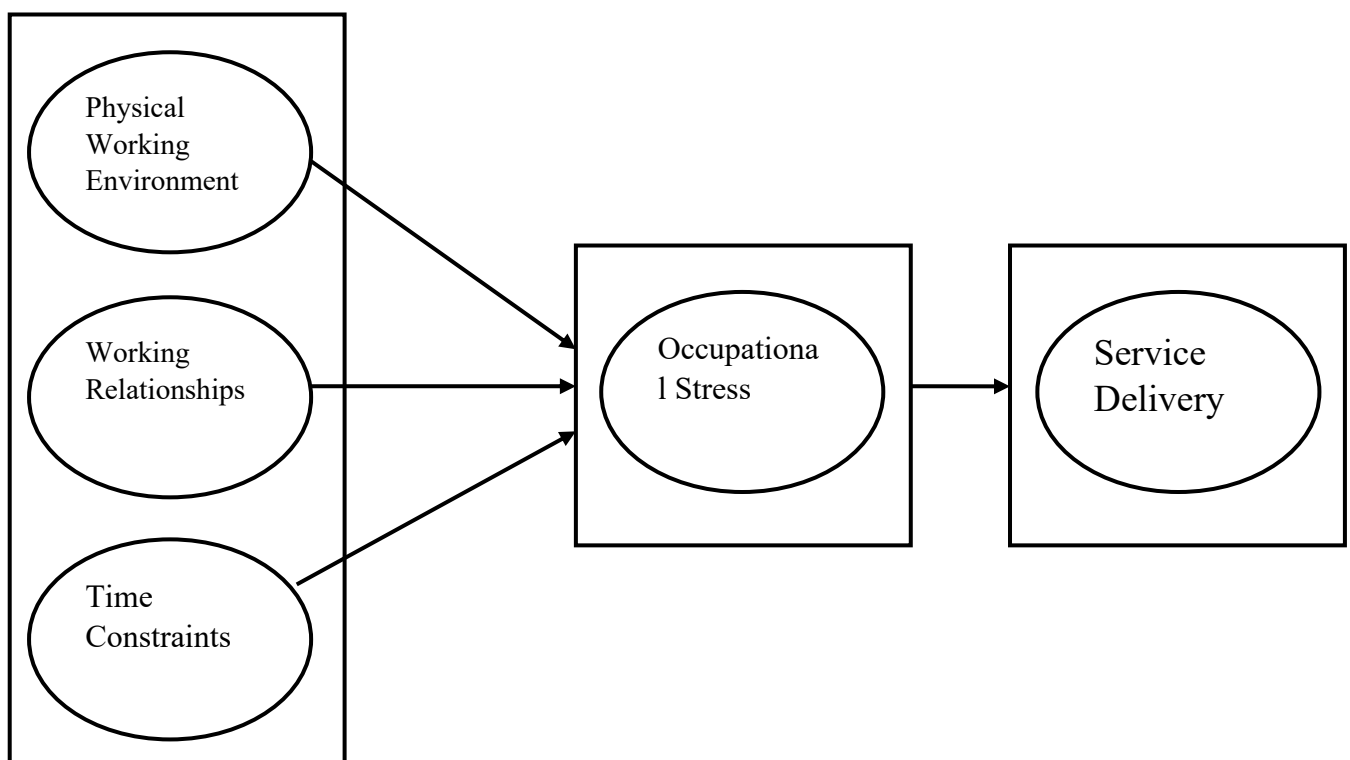
Public Service Motivation theory explains why public officers choose to serve despite low pay [Perry & Wise, 1990]. PSM argues that officers are driven by desire to serve public interest, compassion, and commitment to civic duty. However, PSM is eroded when job demands like poor

conditions and time pressure exceed available resources. When stress is high, officers shift from “service orientation” to “self-preservation orientation”. This theory complements JD-R by explaining _why_ stress leads to poor service beyond just exhaustion.

Conceptual Framework

The study is anchored on the Job Demand/Resources Model by Bakker and Demeroti (2007). The model proposes that job demand such as poor physical working conditions, strained working relationships and excessive time constricts deplete employees energy and lead to occupational stress in turn leads reduce serve delivery/efficiency among executive officers. Therefore, the conceptual framework shows that physical working conditions, working relationships and time constrict mediating role of occupational stress influence service delivery of executive in public service.

Job Demand/Stressors



Source: Researcher construct, 2026. Adapted from J.D-R Model Empirical Studies

- Physical working environment (conditions) and Occupational Health Service Delivery:**
 Physical working environment contributes to the stress of an executive officer when there is role ambiguity, work overload and lack of sanitation, hygiene and safety and poor physical working conditions are a significant cause of workplace stress leading to negative health predicaments and debilitating the effectiveness and efficiently of executive officers for service delivery (Leka et al, 2003).

Job conditions that are full of ergonomic problems, hectic and routine tasks that doesn't utilize workers initiative and skill, and infrequent rests (breaks) under the class of work design often

lead to stress. Also where, officers are having little or no control over work processes, and working in a crowded, noisy and polluted environment leads to stress with effects such as: cardiovascular diseases, back pain, depression, burnout and accidents. With such stressful working conditions, often going with absenteeism, tardiness, consequently leading to poor service delivery in records management, financial control and supporting of policy implementation by executive officers in public service (NIOSH Work group, 1999).

- **Working relationships as Demands:** A number of studies have shown a relationship between working relationships and the physical and mental health of employees (Fulton-Calkins & Stulz, 2009). For instance working in a dehumanizing environment, where one is treated as an object rather than an individual. Having poor working relationships with supervisors and lack of trust and support from workers (Fulton-Calkins & Stulz, 2009).

Poor working relationships, manifest in decreased co-operation, conflict, breakdown in team dynamics, and a feeling of defeat with some sense of failed struggle and losing rank leading to depression, anxiety and absence of social support in workplaces disorients and destabilizes executive officers, leading to poor service delivery in records management, administrative and operational supervision (Wang, 2023).

- **Time constraint/ Workloads and stress Responses**

Persons whose work involves regular interruptions than persons working in a solitary area are more likely to be slow in service delivery. Such persons have to be self-assured and assertive in dealing with people who encroach on their time. (Appleby, 1994). People never seem to have enough time to satisfy their social needs and work demands, which leads to stress and anxiety. For an executive officer to surmount the time constraints that contribute to the stress, he/she has to identify key tasks and responsibilities in his job and give priority to them (Fulton-Calkins & Stulz, 2009; Artkinson, 1988).

Time constraints at work can cause significant stress leading to burnouts, decreased quality of work, and reduced innovation. Time constraints emanate from too many work deadlines, inadequate resources and rigid operational processes, leading to poor service delivery in policy implementation, administrative and operational supervision by executive officers in public service (Timing App, 2024).

Summary and Gap in Literature

The reviewed studies confirm that physical working conditions, working relationships, and time constraints are significant factors influencing occupational stress and service delivery among public officers. However, three gaps exist:

1. Contextual Gap: Most Nigerian studies focus on local government, health workers, or teachers. There is limited qualitative research on Executive Officers in Bayelsa State MDAs who occupy the critical middle cadre for file administration.
2. Methodological Gap: Many studies use quantitative surveys that measure stress with scales. There is a need for qualitative inquiry to capture officers' subjective meanings, coping narratives, and lived experiences of stress in their own words.

3. Integrated Gap: Few studies examine all three job characteristics - physical conditions, relationships, and time constraints - together within one framework like JD-R to understand their combined effect on service delivery.

This study therefore addresses these gaps by using qualitative in-depth interviews to explore how Executive Officers in Bayelsa State public service experience and make meaning of physical working conditions, working relationships, and time constraints, and how these experiences translate into service delivery.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

This paper used the qualitative exploratory research design to conduct the research with no attempt to provide conclusive answer to the research questions but to provide insight, ideas and information of the subject. Since, this paper is qualitative; the interpretivism paradigm fits the paper to provide subjective opinion to the subject of investigation (Alharahsheh & Pius, 2020).

This Job Demands-Resources Model serves as a sensitizing framework to guide data collection, not to test relationships. Through indepth interviews with executive officers, the study explored the lived experiences of physical working conditions of executive officers in the Bayelsa State Public Service in 3 of the MDAs. Also the lived experiences of the working relationships time constraints, of executive officers and how these experiences shape their perception and delivery of public service in the 3 MDAs was explored. Data was analyzed thematically to generate a rich, contextual understanding of occupational stress in the public service in Bayelsa State, Nigeria. (Creswell & Poth, 2018) (Denzin & Lincoln, 2018).

The Study used purposive sampling because of the need to choose participants that have direct experience with the phenomenon under investigation. And the sample size was determined by data saturation and kept at 12 participants, 4 from each of the chosen 3 MDAs. A semi-structured interview guide was used for data collection, as appropriate for phenomenological studies allow flexible responses from participants. (Adeyemi & Adedayo, 2021).

The instrument was validated through expert review and pre-tested with 2 executive officers outside the study area. (Palinkas et al, 2015) Lastly, thematic analysis was used to analyze the data (Bhandari, 2023).

CONCLUSION, FINDINGS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

Where Executive Officers are well trained and adequately catered for, there will be efficient service delivery and good public image. But when public servants are left alone to grapple with harsh conditions of service compounded by difficult economic situations without adequate attention to the maintenance of human capital. There will be low worker morale, increase absenteeism and minimal level of services delivery by executive officers in public service.

Findings

Physical environment is significant hinder effective service delivery of the executive officers, thus, slowing efficiency because of the absence of catering and canteen services, gymnasium for staff exercise program, crèche facilities especially for single parents.

Working relationships significantly hamper collaboration and synergistic benefits in service delivery of the executive officers, The MDAs do not encourage use of good communication techniques amongst staff. And the culture in the MDAs do not discourage rivalry and struggles for resources and postings amongst staffs, thus, slowing efficiency therefore this increases work stress level because it drives the executive officers to loss focus in trying to meet service delivery.

Time constraints significant hamper public service delivery of the executive officers, thus, slowing efficiency therefore this increases work stress because executive officers are not allowed to set their job priorities and determine job completion rate. Executive officers are not also giving enough time for self development. And there is the absence of project management software and electronic time management device. Making the officers to work overtime/double, rushing over jobs to meet time deadlines. Taking away innovation and creativity from their services.

Recommendations

- Government should improve working condition of executive officers by providing facilities such as catering and canteen services, gymnasium for exercise program at work, crèche facilities especially for single parents, adequate rest rooms to improve service deliveries.
- MDAs should create a culture for good working relationships amongst executive officers
- MDAs should introduce remote working, provide project management software and electronic time devices to enable executive officer to have time for balancing work and family life.

Limitations

1. The research paper was conducted in Bayelsa State of Nigeria and this is limitation therefore, further research can be carried out in other parts of Nigeria and Sub-Saharan Africa
2. This research was qualitative. and further research can be done using quantitative

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APPENDIX I

INTERVIEW GUIDE

Topic: Occupational Stress and Service Delivery among Executive Officers, Bayelsa State
Section A: Background - 1 minute

1. How long have you been an Executive Officer, and what are your main duties?
Section B: Core Questions - 25-30 minutes

1. Physical Working Conditions

2. Describe your office environment - space, ventilation, power, furniture, equipment.

Probe: Which part affects you most daily?

2. Working Relationships

3. How is your relationship with your supervisor and colleagues?

Probe: Give one example of how it helped you, and one where it stressed you.

3. Time Constraints/Workload

4. How do you handle workload and deadlines in this office?

Probe: What happens to you when there are too many files with short deadlines?

4. Occupational Stress - Experience

5. What does “occupational stress” mean to you in this job?

6. What signs do you notice in yourself when work becomes stressful?

7. Tell me about one time stress affected how you treated a citizen or handled a file.

5. Service Delivery

8. What does “good service delivery” mean for an Executive Officer?

9. In your experience, how do office conditions, relationships, and workload affect your speed, accuracy, and attitude toward citizens?

Probe: Give one example.

Section C: Closing - 2 minutes

10. If you could change 2 things in your work to reduce stress and improve service, what would they be?