

## Work Stress by Age of University Academic Administrators in South-East Nigeria

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**Key words:** Age, work stress, academic administrators, universities and South-East, Nigeria

**Abstract:** The study objective was to determine the impact of age on work stress among academic administrators of universities in South-East Nigeria. This is a survey study which consisted of 786 public universities administrators of South-East Nigeria (Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo State) in the study area through purposive procedure. The Work Stress of Academic Administrators Questionnaire (WSAAQ) structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) to Strongly Disagreed (SD) was used for data collection. The Cronbach alpha reliability was 0.90. Direct delivery of the questionnaire with five research assistants was employed. For analysis of data, mean and standard deviation were employed. The hypothesis was tested at 0.05 probability level using Analysis of Variance (ANOVA). Results showed that there is no significant mean difference in the work stress of young and old university administrators in South-East Nigeria. Thus, South-East government should try to recruit young administrators and lecturers to their various institutions from time to time to ensure adequacy in job performance and delivery in order to boost human service and work stress-free in universities in South-East Nigeria. Consequently, university administrators are urged to embrace their work with good fate in order to shun work stress.

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## INTRODUCTION

Administrators of institutions seem to perform functions, action or react to administrative issues according to their age. Nauer<sup>[1]</sup> defined age as the number of years that someone has lived or the number of years that something has existed. Age is the period of time that

an individual has elapsed or existed. Blaud *et al.*<sup>[2]</sup> posit that age is one of the factors that may affect an individual's stress situation. However, Garrossa, *et al.*, stated that there may be no age at which a person may be exempted from work stress and its impact. It is a stage or length of life of an individual<sup>[3]</sup>. Supporting, Saunders<sup>[4]</sup> asserted that age is the duration of life or measure of time

of the existence of a person. Age may be seen from different perspectives such as: achievement age, defined as the age in which an individual should be able to complete a specific task successfully, chronological age which means the actual measure of time that has elapsed since birth, mental age which defines the age level of mental ability of a person as gauged by standard intelligence tests, biological age which denotes age as determined by physiology rather than chronology, showing the physical structure of the body as well as changes in the performance of motor skills and sensory awareness and psychological age which explains age based on a person's behaviour, among others<sup>[4]</sup>. Age is defined in this study as the period that has elapsed since the birth of an individual or the length of time an individual has existed (chronological age).

Scholars have tendered differing views concerning the impact of age on work stress. Hasselhorn *et al.*<sup>[5]</sup> argue that an ageing population implies an increasing prevalence of chronic illnesses such as stress. Costa<sup>[6]</sup> averred that age may be associated with an increased vulnerability to several health issues such as work stress. Conway<sup>[7]</sup> posits that older workers may be at risk of work stress because they may find it more difficult to adapt to changing work demands and unstable work environments resulting from continuous technological changes. Costa and Sartori<sup>[8]</sup> hold that ageing is associated with a higher risk of poor health which results in poor workability, poor sleep, chronic fatigue, cardiovascular, gastrointestinal and mental disorders. Hawkley and Caciopopo maintain that the effects of stress and age are truly interactive with stress exacerbating the effects of ageing and vice versa. Conway *et al.*<sup>[9]</sup> aver that ageing or being older may be associated with decreased physical health and consequently decrease in job performance. Scholars such as Galanakis., etc., argued contrarily that as people get older, they experience less stress and that the younger individuals are usually prone to higher stress levels. Mahmood *et al.*<sup>[10]</sup> agree with Galakanis., etc. that younger employees may report more work stress than older ones. This, according to the authors, may be because older employees have reached a stage where career development is not their major concern and hence a number of job characteristics which may cause stress to younger staff who have their career ahead of them, do not cause stress to older staff. Mundell opined that older people may suffer less from stress and its effects due to the fact that they are taking things easy and realizing that it's not worth getting upset about small things.

However, some scholars such as Burroughs<sup>[11]</sup> maintain that being older or younger does not predispose employees to health problems but rather health issues can affect anybody regardless of age. Bittman maintains that there is no age at which individuals are exempted from

stress and even children are not exempted from it and its consequences. Wiley<sup>[12]</sup> agrees with Bittman that stress is a biological phenomenon that is experienced by all persons regardless of age. Balakrishnamurthy and Shankar<sup>[13]</sup> reported that age had no impact on the stress responses of individuals and their productivity at work. The authors further maintained that while stress affects everyone differently, age as a specific factor neither affects stress nor job performance of individuals. Lee averred that though at first glance, it may seem that older people are more prone to work stress, especially, if their physical conditions become limiting, stress affects everyone differently regardless of age. The author further emphasized that young people may be more stressed by factors relating to interpersonal tension, middle-aged people may be more stressed by job and career demands, while for older people it may be more of health issues rather than age that could create stress for them. According to the authors, 'Stressor' means any external or internal agent which facilitates the development of stress or produces stress. Cooper and Marshall in Ugwuagu<sup>[14]</sup> defined stressors as those external or internal forces resulting in a state whereby an individual would be described as being under stress. Oboegbulem<sup>[15]</sup> contributes that stressors are the agents which produce stress. Such stressors, according to the author, tend to produce in the individual not only physical and psychological reactions which are usually distressful or depressing but also symptoms of emotional and psychological instability.

Thus, Auerbach and Gramling<sup>[16]</sup> noted that most stressful major life events involve major life challenges such as the death of a loved one, divorce, rape, losing one's job and major personal disabilities or illnesses. Pastorino and Doyle<sup>[17]</sup> hold that this category of stressor is the most common type of stressor in the daily life of an individual. Auerbach and Gramling<sup>[16]</sup> noted that much of the stress in the lives of individuals result from having to deal with daily hassles pertaining to jobs, personal relationships and everyday living circumstances. Beach, Burns and Sheffield in Essien<sup>[18]</sup> gave instances of daily hassles as living in a noisy neighbourhood, traffic jams, encounters with irritating personalities, misplacing or losing one's valuables, making decisions, meeting deadlines at work or school, conflicts with other people, lack of motivation, job dissatisfaction, threat to life and property, financial hassles among others.

Furthermore, Edwards opined that behavioural effects of stress showcase the way in which a person acts and behaves when under the influence of stress which can be seen outwardly. According to the author, people under stress have a greater tendency to engage in unhealthy behaviours such as excessive use or abuse of alcohol and drugs, cigarette smoking and making poor nutritional

choices. The author maintains that such unhealthy behaviours can further increase the severity of symptoms related to stress, often leading to a “vicious cycle” of symptoms and unhealthy behaviours. Larson and Swierzeski acknowledge that people under stress tend to be anti-social and this can cause strains on relationships with family, friends, co-workers or even strangers. Other indications of behavioural stress, according to Marmot<sup>[19]</sup> include: increased arguments, aggressiveness at the least provocation, tendency to over-react, violent behaviours, crying, substance abuse and mannerisms like nail-biting, hair pulling, among others. According to Bridger *et al.*<sup>[20]</sup>, work stress means stress related to the work environment which poses demands that the individual is not ready to comprehend and as a result cause strain. Thomas *et al.*<sup>[21]</sup> described work stress as involving an interface between occupational structure and the specific organizational culture present in a given environment.

Scholars have noted that certain physical working environmental factors, especially unsatisfactory working conditions, can affect the well-being of workers. Oboegbulem<sup>[15]</sup> identified these factors as being organizational in origin or organizational stressors which result from the failure of schools or educational institutions to organize themselves properly to meet the expectations of the general public as well as those of the teachers and their students. Husain refers to job performance as the outcomes and accomplishments valued by the organization or system that an individual works in. Ogbonnaya in Mgbodile<sup>[22]</sup> synthesized the concept of administration as the ability to make people, activities and things function so that objectives are achieved using men, materials and funds in an organization to achieve objectives directing and controlling the affairs of an organization. Hall<sup>[23]</sup> explained that administration consists of the following basic elements: planning, organizing, directing, coordinating, reporting and budgeting. Planning involves taking decisions about actions in the future. Organizing is the setting up of structures and taking decisions on the actual activities that will help to achieve goals. Directing involves making the personnel to work. Adding to the role of administration especially, university administration, Nwafor and Nwafor were of the view that the central focus of the university is the production of knowledge derived through teaching and research. To this end, universities play three statutory functions which are teaching, research and public/community service. Thus, it seems like work stress surface to both young and old in their bide to accomplish the above statutory functions, hence, the study objective is to determine the impact of age and work stress among academic administrators of universities in South East, Nigeria.

**Purpose of the study:** The sole objective of this study was to determine the impact of age and work stress among academic administrators of universities in South East, Nigeria. Specifically, the study sought to determine the: Mean difference in workstress among younger and olderuniversity administrators in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

**Research question:** The following research question was raised to guide the study. What is the mean difference in the work stress among younger and older university administrators in South-East Nigeria?

**Hypothesis:** The hypothesis below was raised and tested at 0.05 probability level. There is no significant mean difference in works tress among younger and older university administratorsin public universities in South-East Nigeria.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The study is a descriptive survey research. The study took place in universities in South-East, Nigeria. South-Eastern Nigeria is one of the six geopolitical zones in Nigeria. The zone is made up of five states namely: Abia, Anambra, Ebonyi, Enugu and Imo States. In the zone, there are ten public universities made up of five federal and five state-owned universities. They include Abia State University, Uturu, Abia State; Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Uli, Anambra State; Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki, Ebonyi State; Enugu State University of Science and Technology, Enugu; Federal University of Technology, Owerri, Imo State; Federal University, Ndufu-Alike, Ikwo, Ebonyi State; Imo State University, Owerri; Michael Okpara University of Agriculture, Umudike, Umuahia, Abia State; NnamdiAzikiwe University, Awka, Anambra State and University of Nigeria, Nsukka, Enugu State.

In South-East, Nigeria,there are five states which constitute the major Igbo speaking areas in Nigeria and show a lot of features in common including their cultural, political, educational and social orientations. The zone has a total population size of sixteen million, three hundred and eighty one thousand, seven hundred and twenty-nine (16, 381, 729) which is approximately twelve percent (12%) of the entire population of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, judging from the 2006 National Population Census in Nigeria (National Population Commission, 2006). Climatically, the zone is situated at the tropical rain forest with thick vegetation. According to Agboeze and Nwankwo<sup>[24]</sup>, the zone is notable for two major climates, wet (March-October) and dry (November-February) seasons with other climatic conditions subsumed under the major ones. The population of the study was786 academic administrators

in federal and state universities in the South-East geopolitical zone of Nigeria, comprising of deans of 103 faculties, heads of the entire 572 academic departments and 111 directors of institutes/centres. The study sampled the whole population for the study. Researcher-developed 30 item questionnaire titled “The Work Stress of Academic Administrators Questionnaire (WSAAQ)” structured on a four-point rating scale of Strongly Agreed (SA) to Strongly Disagreed (SD) was used for data collection. The instrument was face-validated by three experts from Faculty of Education, University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Data from 30 academic administrators from one federal and one state university in Rivers State, South-South, Nigeria was used to determine the internal consistency estimate of the instrument. The reliability estimate was computed using Cronbach alpha. Cronbach alpha was considered appropriate because the items were not dichotomously scored. This is in line with the assertion of Ali<sup>[25]</sup> that Cronbach’s alpha is mainly used for internal consistency reliability calculation when the test items are non-dichotomous and no response is deemed correct or wrong. Cronbach alpha value of 0.90 was obtained which makes the instrument to be considered reliable for the study.

The instrument was administered directly to the respondents by the researchers with the aid of five research assistants. The researchers adequately briefed the research assistants on the nature of the research, explaining each item as contained in the instrument and how to administer and retrieve the questionnaire from the respondents. The employment of the research assistants was to enable the researchers to effectively and timeously distribute and collect the questionnaire. The direct delivery method was used for data collection as to ensure maximum recovery of the questionnaire administered and to minimize instrument mortality. The researchers and assistants used four weeks to administer and retrieve the questionnaire from the respondents. Few of the respondents filled and returned the questionnaire on the spot. The research question was answered using mean and standard deviation. Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) was used to test the hypothesis.

### RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

**Research question:** What is the mean difference in workstress among younger and older academic administrator’s job performance in universities in South-East Nigeria? Data on Table 1 shows the mean and

Table 1: Mean difference in workstress among male and female academic administrators in Public Universities in South-East Nigeria

Item statements	30-40 years N = 61			41years N = 232			51 years and above N = 452		
	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	Dec	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Dec	$\bar{X}_3$	SD <sub>3</sub>	Dec
<b>When I am under stress at work:</b>									
<b>Health challenges</b>									
1: I experience burnout which reduces my efficiency at work	2.80	0.77	A	2.78	0.78	A	2.67	0.79	A
2: I usually suffer a loss of memory which makes me get involved in workplace accidents	3.18	0.80	A	3.11	0.83	A	3.04	0.85	A
3: I am prone to heart diseases such as high blood pressure which reduces my ability to do my job	3.01	0.78	A	2.97	0.76	A	3.05	0.77	A
4: I often suffer headaches and muscle pains which hinder my job performance	2.52	0.72	A	2.79	0.76	A	2.76	0.77	A
5: I suffer gastrointestinal diseases such as diarrhoea which makes me achieve less in my job performance	2.55	0.71	A	2.73	0.75	A	2.80	0.80	A
6: I experience eating disorders such as loss of appetite which lowers my strength for work	2.95	0.78	A	3.01	0.77	A	2.98	0.86	A
7: I experience sleep difficulties such as insomnia which makes me unable to respond quickly to demands placed on me	2.60	0.71	A	2.84	0.76	A	2.80	0.74	A
8: I resort to alcoholic beverages leading to loss of focus in the performance of my job	2.68	0.78	A	2.78	0.71	A	2.83	0.79	A
9: I usually incur high costs of health care which dampens my zest for performance in my job	3.26	0.77	A	3.26	0.75	A	3.21	0.78	A
<b>Job tension</b>									
0: I feel tensed which reduces my ability to do my work	2.70	0.76	A	2.85	0.75	A	2.73	0.74	A
“I experience difficulties in concentration leading to aggressiveness to staff and students	2.73	0.68	A	2.65	0.67	A	2.54	0.69	A
12: I find it difficult to communicate effectively with my staff leading to serious misunderstandings	2.80	0.79	A	2.98	0.79	A	2.90	0.81	A
13: I am unable to complete tasks on time due to frequent mood swings	3.00	0.70	A	3.11	0.75	A	3.05	0.73	A
14: I find it difficult to make decisions that affect the lives of my staff and students	2.44	0.74	D	2.51	0.76	A	2.63	0.69	A
15: I am often late to important appointments that have to do with my job	2.29	0.76	D	2.41	0.76	D	2.52	0.67	A
16: I often make careless mistakes in the course of performing my job	2.31	0.78	D	2.42	0.75	D	2.58	0.68	A
17: I often forget important things which render me incapable of meeting up with my work schedules	2.78	0.58	A	2.86	0.64	A	2.78	0.65	A

Table 1: Continue

Item statements	30-40 years N = 61			41years N = 232			51 years and above N = 452		
	$\bar{X}_1$	SD <sub>1</sub>	Dec	$\bar{X}_2$	SD <sub>2</sub>	Dec	$\bar{X}_3$	SD <sub>3</sub>	Dec
<b>Low morale/low job satisfaction</b>									
18: I usually experience low morale which reduces my ability to perform my job	2.34	0.47	D	2.41	0.50	D	2.38	0.48	D
19: I experience loss of interest in my job which reduces my motivation for task accomplishments	2.59	0.52	A	2.66	0.52	A	2.62	0.52	A
20: I am often absent from office and classes due to loss of interest in my job	2.44	0.50	D	2.38	0.48	D	2.39	0.48	D
21: I am unable to perform my supervisory role on my staff due to low morale in my job	2.59	0.52	A	2.63	0.52	A	2.60	0.53	A
22: I often desire to quit my job due to feelings of dissatisfaction	2.31	0.73	D	2.36	0.65	D	2.38	0.67	D
23: Low morale in my job negatively affects my staff members in their job performance	2.55	0.59	A	2.65	0.51	A	2.64	0.53	A
<b>Poor work relationships</b>									
24: I often shout and yell at my staff which hampers their confidence in their job performance	2.55	0.59	A	2.65	0.51	A	2.64	0.53	A
25: I find it difficult to delegate responsibilities to my subordinates which increases my workload	2.59	0.69	A	2.57	0.67	A	2.53	0.69	A
26: I often withdraw to myself leading to loss of sense of responsibility in my job	2.67	0.67	A	2.61	0.68	A	2.56	0.70	A
27: I am predisposed to blaming others which erode staff morale for productivity	2.36	0.57	D	2.28	0.56	D	2.28	0.55	D
28: I find it difficult to listen to my subordinate which obstructs teamwork	2.60	0.66	A	2.53	0.67	A	2.51	0.69	A
29: I find it difficult to express appreciation to my staff which lowers their commitment to their jobs	2.39	0.63	D	2.42	0.64	D	2.38	0.67	D
30: I am often intolerant of the mistakes of my staff which hinders their creativity at work	2.37	0.58	D	2.40	0.61	D	2.35	0.64	D
<b>Cluster mean</b>	<b>2.63</b>	<b>0.23</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>2.69</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>A</b>	<b>2.67</b>	<b>0.24</b>	<b>A</b>

Table 2: ANOVA of the significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities with regard to the impact of age and work stress on job performance

Groups	Sum of squares	Df	Mean square	F-values	Sig.
Between groups	0.132	2	0.07	1.09	0.34
Within groups	44.921	743	0.06		
Total	45.053	745			

standard deviations of responses on the impact of work stress on academic administrator’s job performance in universities in South-East Nigeria based on the age of the respondents. The result showed that respondents within the ages of 30-40 agreed on items 1-13, 17, 19, 21, 23-26 and 28 with mean ratings above the 2.50 benchmark. Respondents within the age range of 41-50 agreed on items 1-14, 17, 19, 21, 23-26 and 28 with mean rating above the 2.50 benchmark for each of the items. The respondents within the ages of 51 and above agreed on items 1-17, 19, 21, 23 26 and 28 with mean ratings of 2.50 and above for each of the items. Also, all the respondents disagreed on items 18, 20, 22, 27, 29 and 30 as being the impact of work stress on academic administrator’s job performance in universities in South-East Nigeria with mean ratings below 2.50 for each of the items. Items 15 and 16 were disagreed on by respondents within the age groups of 30-40 and 41-50 years. However, the cluster means and standard deviations of 2.63 and 0.023, 2.69 and 0.24, 2.67 and 0.24 for age groups of 30-40, 41-50 and 51 years and above, respectively showed that the

respondents agreed that majority of the items on Table 1 are impact of work stress on academic administrator’s job performance in universities in South-East Nigeria.

**Hypothesis:** There is no significant mean difference in work stress among younger and older university administrators in public universities in South-East Nigeria.

Data on Table 2 show the ANOVA result of the significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities with regard to the impact of work stress on job performance based on age. The result showed that an f-ratio of 1.09 with a significant value of 0.34 was obtained. Since, the significant value of 0.34 > 0.05 set as level of significance, it means that the null hypothesis which stated that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of academic administrators of universities with regard to the impact of work stress on job performance based on age is accepted. An inference drawn, therefore is that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of

academic administrators of universities with regard to the impact of work stress on job performance based on age. The result of the null hypothesis on the impact of work stress on academic administrator's job performance based on age revealed that there is no significant difference between the mean ratings of the respondents with regard to the impact of work stress on job performance based on the age groups (30-40, 41-50, 51 and above). This means that work stress impacts equally on the job performance of the academic administrators irrespective of their age differences. The finding aligns with that of Balakrishnamurthy and Shankar<sup>[13]</sup> who reported that age has no impact on the stress responses of individuals and their productivity at work. The findings also agree with the opinion of Burroughs<sup>[11]</sup>, that being older or younger does not predispose employees to health problems but rather health issues can affect anybody regardless of age. The finding also corroborates the view of Bittman that there is no age at which individuals are exempted from stress and even children are not exempted from it and its consequences. However, the findings disagree with the opinion of Mundell, that older people may suffer less from stress and its effects due to the fact that they are taking things easy and realizing that it's not worth getting upset about small things. The findings also disagree with that of Mahmood *et al.*<sup>[10]</sup> who discovered that younger and older academic managers experience more stress than the middle-aged ones.

### CONCLUSION

Work stress among university academic administrators in South-East, Nigeria is not attributed to individual age rather other factors like health-related issues. Government is, therefore, urged to provide an enabling environment where academic administrators will operate maximally to reach expected objectives of universities.

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