

Mental Health Conversations with Lecturers in the Educational Institutions: A case of Selected Universities in Eldoret, Kenya



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ABSTRACT: This study provides an understanding of stress and how it is associated with mental health which often affects lecturers in the Universities. Globally, mental health is recognized as an issue of interest because it cuts across all gender, ages, races, social class among others. People with mental health conditions ranging from depression, anxiety and mood disorders face stigmatization and discrimination in the educational institutions, health care and employment. Studies have shown that people believe mental health issues have been caused by punishment from God, black magic, sin inherited from parents among others which often leads to shame, guilt and concealing the mental health issue further exacerbating the problem. This study therefore provides an understanding of how the mental health affects lecturers and how it interferes with their productivity at the work place. The study is qualitative in nature and 20 respondents who were based in Universities in Eldoret Town were interviewed. The methods of sampling used were purposive and snowball sampling. The study was analyzed by use of narratives and the emerging themes were family problems, extra workload, unconducive working environment, financial constraints and delayed promotions. The results obtained will add to theoretical knowledge and may help in policy formulation of mental health.

KEYWORDS: lecturers, mental health, working environment, stigma

1. BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY

It is estimated that close to 1 Billion individuals are affected by mental and addictive disorders. This in turn contributed to about 7% of the global disease burden which is measured in DALYs (Disability-adjusted life years). Poor mental health has been shown to cost the global economy approximately \$2.5 trillion per year in poor health and reduced productivity and it is estimated that by 2030 the cost is projected to rise to \$6 trillion The Lancet Global Health (2020).

A sizable fraction of the world's population suffers from mental and addiction problems, with a high burden in high- and upper-middle-income nations. Due in part to stigma and inadequate treatment, the relative prevalence of mental diseases has increased over the past few decades. Future studies must examine the relationship between mental and addiction problems and changes in life expectancy in greater detail (Rehm & Shield, 2019). In Kenya, mental health challenges account for 16% of the burden of disease which is more than HIV, which contributes for about 15% of the burden of disease (Meyer & Ndeti, 2016).

The World Health Organization (WHO) defines mental health as a condition of mental well-being that permits people to effectively manage life's stressors, develop their potential, study and work effectively, and make constructive contributions to their communities. Our ability to make decisions, form connections, and influence our communities as individuals and as a collective depends in large part on our mental health and well-being. (World Health Organization (WHO), 2022).

It is very important to have clarity when using the terms 'mental health' and 'mental illness'. The two can be perceived as separate but they can still be related issues. According to Ryff and Singer (1998), health is not only a medical word linked to the absence of disease; rather, it is a philosophical idea that calls for an explanation of what constitutes a good life, one in which a person has command over oneself, respect for others, and a sense of purpose.

On the other hand, mental illness is a term used to describe a medical disease that involves changes in mood, thought, or behavior and is linked to emotional suffering as well as difficulties interacting with others, the workplace, and family life. In addition to raising the risk of long-term physical illness, poor mental health can result in suicidal thoughts and intents. One prevalent indication of mental disorder is suicide tendency (Townsend & Morgan, 2020).

One of the biggest obstacles to the general public's mental health and wellness improving is stigma and discrimination. The development of a person's views toward mental illness, as well as their attitudes and actions toward those who are classified as mentally ill, are influenced by a variety of variables. These elements include the individual's own or a loved one's personal

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experience with mental illness, the media's effect, theories about the etiology of mental diseases, and sociocultural influences (Hinshaw, 2005).

Kenya is experiencing a rapid rise in suicides, mental health conditions, substance use and addictive disorders of an epidemic proportion, an indication of social challenges and unmet needs at societal level. It is estimated that 50% of all mental disorders start at the age of 14 years and 75% at the age of 24 years (Task force on Mental Health, 2020).

In the field of education, the focus on mental health issues has historically been on students rather than tutors. Since work stress is a significant risk factor for anxiety and depression, mental health is a crucial occupational health concern for lecturers in higher education.

Studies (Kinman, 2008, Tytherleig et al., 2005, Winefield and Jarret 2001) suggests that stress levels in universities are high among the faculty members. Murkatik et al., (2020) opined that across the academia world, faculty remain the primary assets of the educational process where they influence individuals, groups and the society and cater to the demands of producing capable and efficient human resources capable of meeting the demands of the community and employment.

Faculty members, including lecturers, may encounter unseen obstacles like rigorous workloads, high standards, the need to teach well, and administrative responsibilities. The stress of securing career paths and navigating the fiercely competitive academic environment can be detrimental to faculty members' mental health. It is against this backdrop that the study was conducted so as to understand more on how the lecturers are affected and how they deal with mental health issues. It is therefore critical to give lecturers' mental health top priority because it could have a detrimental effect on both them and their institutions. (Melnik, 2023). Many studies on mental health among lecturers are quantitative in nature but this study will be qualitative as it seeks to understand lecturers' mental health issues from an in depth holistic perspective hence the sample size used was 20 respondents.

1.1 Research Objectives

The following are the objectives of the study:

1. To find out the factors that contribute to stress among lecturers in Universities.
2. To investigate the effect of stress on lecturers in the Universities.
3. To examine the coping strategies used by the lecturers to alleviate stress in the Universities.

1.2 Research Questions

1. What are the factors that contribute to stress among lecturers in Universities?
2. How does stress affect the lecturers in the Universities?
3. What are the coping strategies used by lecturers to alleviate stress in the Universities?

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

This section dealt with the mental health issues affecting the lecturers as well as their effects. They are discussed below:

2.1 Mental Health Issues among Lecturers

Friedman (2003) observed that the teaching profession is considered as highly stressful which has several stressors which increases the risk of burnout. According to Kyriacou (2001) teacher stress is the unpleasant, negative emotions that a teacher experiences as a result of their work as a teacher, such as tension, anger, anxiety, frustration, or depression. Some of the issues are discussed below:

2.1.1 Workload

Research has shown that workload has a direct correlation to emotional exhaustion and absenteeism, and negative job satisfaction and performance (Huyghebaert et al., 2018). Being overworked limits and obstructs people's ability to realize who they are and fails to meet their psychological needs (Albrecht, 2015).

Fatigue and disturbed sleep have also been connected to excessive workloads. In fact, a heavy workload can contribute to poor sleep quality because stressful work environments cause the psycho-physiological system to remain activated throughout the night, impeding full recovery and resulting in symptoms like insomnia or psychosomatic complaints. Employee health and organizational performance may also suffer as a result of poor sleep quality (Geurts & Sonnentag, 2006).

Incomplete recovery resulting from excessive workload may lead to a variety of adverse consequences. Because many tutors spend most of their resources to deal with the high workload, and because incomplete recovery does not allow them to restore the spent resources, tutors feel drained and they are not able to deal with their daily demands and their interactions at work, this in turn leads to lower levels of satisfaction and performance at work (Huyghebaert et al., 2018).

According to a survey conducted by Kinman and Wray (2013) on the welfare of university professors in the United Kingdom, it was noted that 75% of the professors believed that their work was stressful and that with the passing of time their stress levels increased.

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2.1.2 Faculty-Related Factors

Gaining experience, teaching, producing knowledge, and achieving personal goals are all possible in an academic career. All of these achievements, meanwhile, are not without their share of difficulties. Higher education faculty members are expected to conduct research, work together with colleagues, instruct students, and support both the institutions and the communities they serve. With all of these demands, faculty members' mental health could suffer (Halat et al., 2023).

During the early formative years of a new lecturer, the challenges that one experiences may include trying to find the right balance between starting a family, or caring for a young family or taking care of their aging parents. Trying to juggle these responsibilities brings about challenges to their work-life balance and if not well taken care of might have a negative impact on their mental health status (Azevedo et al., 2020).

Senior faculty frequently have different professional needs than colleagues in their early or mid-career stages. While some may still be interested in advancing their careers, others become more focused on new facets of their line of work, like mentoring junior faculty members, serving the public, taking on administrative responsibilities, and contributing to teaching. Numerous individuals express interest in accommodating more flexible work schedules and contributing to the academy in domains where they possess honed skills and knowledge (Stearns et al., 2013).

2.1.3 Student-Related Factors

Stress caused by teaching and student interaction is regarded as a major detriment to university faculty members' life satisfaction and well-being. Faculty at the beginning of their careers are often unprepared for professional teaching activities and proper student interaction, and investing time in these issues can result in a lower level of satisfaction. Teaching and the preparation and evaluation of students through grading papers and providing feedback is time-consuming and necessitates training and incentives (Won, 2014). This results not only in less research time for faculty, but also in psychological frustration as a result of feelings of inadequacy and being unable to reap the benefits of the time they devote to their work. The problem becomes exacerbated when faculty are required to handle large class sizes, putting them under excessive workload and increasing academic stress from not being able to dedicate enough time to their expanding student populations (McDonald, 2013).

Teaching is a daily practice that requires faculty members to deal with underprepared or struggling students who need additional layers of support and attention. Faculty members may experience anxiety and feelings of discouragement about their work due to the pressure to guarantee student success and meet academic standards. They may also experience discomfort when students perform poorly (Vértiz-Osores *et al.*, 2019).

Teachers may experience intense emotions and have an adverse effect on their professional well-being when students behave disruptively in the classroom. Examples of such behavior include disrespect, cheating, plagiarism, and demanding more resources or grades. Such disciplinary disruptions require time and effort to handle, which can cause stress and frustration (Spilt *et al.*, 2011).

2.1.4 Poor Remuneration

Due to the liberalization of the education sector in Kenya, it led to an increase in student enrollment and also to the mushrooming of various institutions of higher learning thus competition for staff. This has led to the shortage of qualified staff which has led to the available lecturers seeking more part time engagements to supplement their perceived low incomes (Kyule *et al.*, 2016).

One strategy an organization uses to boost employee motivation and morale is remuneration. It is implied that an employee can meet their financial obligations if they receive sufficient compensation. On the other hand, inadequate compensation results in low motivation and work commitment, which drives employees to look for additional sources of income to supplement their salary (Steers et al., 2003).

2.1.5 COVID-19

The severe acute respiratory distress syndrome coronavirus 2 (SARS-CoV-2) outbreak that began in December 2019 was spreading throughout the world and was resulting in serious complications related to respiratory illnesses. Shortly after, the World Health Organization (WHO) declared the related illness, known as coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19), to be a pandemic (Wang et al., 2020).

Up until May 2023, when the pandemic was declared to be no longer a public health emergency, there were over 765 million COVID-19 cases globally, and the illness claimed about 7 million lives. In addition to shocking patients, the pandemic's effects have shocked society, the environment, the world economy, and politics, resulting in an even worse financial crisis than the one that occurred in 2008 (WHO, 2023).

Naciro *et al.*, (2021) postulated that there was a rise in mental health problems among the broader populace due to the pandemic's associated feelings of fear, anxiety, and loneliness. Like other facets of society, education has been severely impacted. There has been an urgent switch to remote learning, modifications to platforms and tools for instruction, and adjustments to assessment procedures.

With the pandemic's abrupt and unprecedented manifestations in early 2020, higher education saw more significant changes in a matter of weeks than it had in the preceding ten years. Improvements were regularly made and concerns were raised about practices

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academia had long used for delivering educational programs as educators became aware of the scope and complexity of the issues brought about by the pandemic (Naciri et al., 2021).

The pandemic upended the fundamental presumptions and ideas that support higher education and changed the place, time, and community that were once thought to be the cornerstones of an institution's success. The new circumstances, which included how people teach and learn, collaborate with others, and balance their personal and professional lives, required faculty, staff, and students to quickly adapt. Faculty members' health was negatively impacted by this as well as the instability and uncertainty brought on by the pandemic; alarming signs of stress, anxiety, and depression were reported (Ma et al., 2022).

In order to comply with the new COVID-19 framework, faculty members had to uphold their professionalism, continuously ensure quality, and alter courses, assessments, extracurricular activities, committee and student services, research priorities, and various academic positions. They also had to cope with reduced pay, budget cuts, unreliable research, and the detrimental effects of working remotely on their relationships with peers and work-life balance (Ma et al., 2022).

According to Zheng et al., (2022), the term "techno stress," was coined during the pandemic and it refers to the pressure professors experienced when they had to work online in a different, faster, and more demanding manner. It discourages professors from using technology because it has a negative impact on their social, physiological, and psychological status as well as cause sleep disturbances and social disruption. A few elements that contributed to the burden on faculty and made psychological stress and mental health issues worse included low Internet bandwidth, a lack of IT resources, crowded households, low technological literacy, and a lack of training in online teaching.

2.2 Coping with the Mental Health Issues

Faculty mental health is not a personal issue; rather, it is the duty of all important aspects of the academic experience, each of which bears a different responsibility for upholding norms, practices, and policies that have an impact on well-being. Thus, it is imperative to take a methodical and proactive approach involving educators, organizations, and culture to bring about a fundamental shift that puts academics' well-being first (Johnson & Lester, 2021).

Darbishire et al. (2020) posits that the close relationship between an individual's mental health and the psychological workplace environment, the impact of organizational culture on faculty well-being cannot be understated. Consequently, places of employment can contribute to an individual's well-being, and a positive work atmosphere is linked to lower levels of depression, burnout, and job dissatisfaction. Stress reduction, anxiety reduction, and burnout mitigation may all be greatly aided by mental health interventions that take an organizational approach, starting at the management level. In higher education, the first step in developing strategies to support faculty mental health should be a careful assessment and investigation of current conditions, along with a diligent search for variables linked to faculty burnout and stress. Meeting the mental health needs of faculty members should be a priority after these factors have been recognized and identified (Deneckere et al., 2013).

Furthermore, Dyer (2023) reported that It is also the personal responsibility of faculty members to develop stress-relieving, productivity-boosting habits that lessen the invasion of their privacy caused by work-related obligations. Faculty members must be proactive and accountable in their pursuit of a work-life balance, in asking for help when they need it, and in advocating for a shift in the academic culture. It is recommended to adopt a number of evidence-based lifestyle changes, such as maintaining a healthy weight, drinking plenty of water, exercising frequently, getting enough sleep, and maintaining a nutritious diet.

Balancing life and career requires faculty to set realistic workload expectations and to advocate for a culture of declining additional responsibilities and opportunities in favor of making time for themselves, their families, and their research. Setting boundaries applies to working with students, delegating assignments, distributing workload, eliminating unnecessary tasks, and employing smart time management techniques. This allows you to relax, unwind, and disconnect from work in an era where work emails are accessible via smartphones, making everyone always available and reachable. Recent research suggests that checking emails less frequently reduces stress and maintains a variety of well-being indicators (Kushlev & Dunn, 2015).

2.3 Theoretical framework

Studies (Aldwin, 1994, Cohen et al. 1986, Lazarus and Folkman 1984) have reported that stress occurs when an individual perceives a mismatch between the demands of their environment and the resources they have to deal with those expectations. Stress can be defined as the perception of a person when they feel that the demands placed on them by their environment are overwhelming and surpassing their available resources, putting them at risk. These stress sensations range from mundane daily irritations to potentially fatal obstacles. Lazarus and Folkman (1984) propose a stress and coping model consisting of five primary components namely:

- i. person and environment influencing factors,
- ii. cognitive appraisals,
- iii. stress,
- iv. coping response, and
- v. Adaptational outcomes both for the short term and long term

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The theory emphasizes the impact of personal and situational characteristics on how individuals evaluate the conditions they face. Therefore, the initial evaluation of a potential danger or disadvantage relies on the individual's preceding circumstances on the menacing situation.

The study conducted by Cohen et al. in 1986 examined the impact of stimulus and the psychological traits of individuals. Lazarus and Folkman define the primary evaluation based on these antecedents. According to Lazarus, stress appraisal refers to the evaluation of an interaction as either irrelevant, benign-positive, or stressful. (Folkman, 1984, p. 53)

Secondary appraisal deals with coping strategies and encompass "an evaluation regarding what is possible and can be accomplished" (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984, p. 53). The evaluative aspect of this assessment primarily centres on the accessibility of particular coping mechanisms, the anticipated probability of their effectiveness, and the capability to use these strategies in the given circumstances. Therefore, the concept of coping can be comprehended as "a deliberate effort made by an individual to cope with challenging circumstances, either by making alterations or the individual can address their anxiety by managing the circumstance well (Baum & Paulus, 1987, p. 563). Secondary appraisal refers to the dynamic interplay between an individual and their surrounding environment.

In relation to this study, the theory is important because it explains that different lecturers deal with stress differently depending on how they perceive it to be. What stresses one lecturer may be different from what stresses another. This of course will affect how one deals with the challenge. This variation can be caused by one's internal resilience, peer support, one's notion of the stress etc.

3. RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

The research was conducted in Eldoret Town and Qualitative Research Design was used. The sampling method used was purposive and snowball sampling and Phenomenology design was used to analyze data as it gives data that is rich and detailed. A total of 20 academic staff ranging from Tutorial fellows to lecturers to Senior Lecturers to Professors were interviewed from August to September where they were interviewed for 60-90 minutes at a place and time convenient for them owing to the sensitive nature of the research. Pseudo names were used to ensure confidentiality and the information given was tape recorded, coded manually and transcribed for easier analysis. Finally, the emerging data was analyzed thematically. This entails identifying, describing and interpreting the meaning of the information given by respondents (Braun,2018)

4. RESULTS AND DISCUSSIONS

The study found the following data from the respondents which was analyzed thematically: family problems, heavy workload, negative attitude from bosses and colleagues, financial constraints and lastly stigma which are discussed below:

4.1 Socio-Demographic Characteristics

		N=20	%=100
Gender	n	%	
Male	7		35%
Female	13		65%
Age			
30-39	10		50%
40-49	6		30%
50-99	4		20%
Religion			
Christian	16		80%
Islam	4		20%
Academic Title			
Professor	2		10%
Senior Lecturer	3		15%
Lecturer	5		25%
Tutorial Fellow	10		50%

From the data above, the study found that both male and female go through mental health challenges with more female in the study (65%) than male at 35%. This could be attributed to the fact that men tend to be silent about their challenges than women who are open are free to discuss with their friends, family and researchers.

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The study also found that majority of the academic staff with mental health challenges happen to be the young ones from age 30-39 at 50% while the least were from age 50-59 at 20%. This could be attributed to the young generation having a lot to deal with from trying to balance academics, career and family while the older generation are more settled and know how to navigate through the system. The ages are pervasive too and this could imply that everyone whether old or young is battling with a challenge in their life. However, a study by Mahmood et al. (2013) had divergent views as they found occupational stress increases with age since the older lecturers had a hard time incorporating technology in their work as well as reviewing the curriculum compared to their younger counterparts.

Finally, the study found that all academic ranks have mental health challenges right from tutorial fellows to the professors which could suggest that mental health is not a respecter of persons and can affect anyone although the tutorial fellows compared to professors seem to be affected the most. A similar study by Afridah et al. (2023) on factors influencing mental health of lecturers in Indonesia found that on the 92 respondents in the study, the higher the academic title, the lesser the level of stress because one has a higher self-concept and esteem owing to the academic achievement.

The following themes emerged from the study:

4.2 Family Problems

A respondent disclosed how grief had affected her work shown in the excerpt below:

I used to have a lot of problems focusing on university work after my husband died. I had been married for twenty-four years and my husband was my best friend, mentor and confidant. I could go to class and I would be blank while teaching to the point of students noticing and it was really disconcerting. I tried applying for leave but my head of department refused because we were in the middle of the semester and no one could take my courses. This made me infuriated consequently drifting away. To date I have never healed and if I had enough money I would quit working as I feel I am doing disservice to the students.

Fiona, 50-year-old Senior Lecturer

Fresia when talking on family matters expressed the following:

I got married when young hence never had an opportunity to enjoy life since I had just finished high school while heavily pregnant. Years later I advanced my education and started enjoying money, meeting new people in academia and this put a strain on my marriage. My husband started accusing me of having affairs and would go to lengths of refusing me to attend conferences and participate extra responsibilities assigned by my boss in the workplace. This made me fall out with them and I found myself taking alcohol so as to cope with these challenges. Alcohol led to more problems with my husband and we ended up separating since we could not agree on anything. My boss was not very understanding of my predicaments and it was then I received a warning letter as I used to miss so many lectures, I am currently in Rehabilitation centre and trying to make sense of my life since I had become a slave to the bottle.

Fresia, 42-year-old Lecturer

Felix on family issues and mental health reported that:

Academia is usually time consuming as a lot of time is spent in Research. This put a lot of strain in my young family as my wife and I had just gotten a baby girl. I was not fully present as a husband and as a father since I was so busy trying to manage teaching and finishing my Doctorate. My wife could not understand me and she resorted to having affairs secretly. When I got to know of this, it hurt my ego and I confronted her and this led to a fight which I regret to date as she became very withdrawn. I miss my wife and kid so much and I cannot function well without them. My performance appraisal was not so good at the work place since I started being absent minded and missed so many classes and failed to do office work that had been assigned to me. Needless to say, I got a warning letter. I am here with an unfinished thesis, broken family and a boss angry at me. You know men are not allowed to talk about their problems but take them in and handle them as men.

Felix, 33-year-old Tutorial Fellow

Fibi was affected by a sick daughter as shown in the excerpt below:

My daughter was diagnosed with Cancer and this was the darkest season of my life. My University medical cover is too little to take care of her and this saddened me seeing that I could not pay for her medications and chemo yet I am working. The salary is also peanuts as the Parallel program that used to be a cash cow for us unfortunately went South and it does not have large numbers like before. Seeing her in pain demotivates me and many times I find no joy in working yet I cannot quit as I still need the little money I receive. I take Dulamin anti-depressant to manage my emotional pain as I need to be strong for her sake. I am lucky to have a caring boss who has never summoned me despite my high level of absenteeism though I frequently compensate by teaching online in the hospital's parking lot when taking her for medical care.

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Fibi, 50-year-old Lecturer

From the narratives above, the study discovered that family problems have a spillover effect on the work place. Where the family is unstable, there is a high probability that it will lead to unstable work environment hence low productivity which in turn leads to friction with the bosses as there is high absenteeism. A qualitative study by Ahmad et al. (2020) revealed that 16 out of 20 respondents reported that family were not happy with them working for long hours and some respondents expressed that the family members would urge them not to bring office work at home. This suggests that family appreciate strong family ties and spending quality time with their loved ones and not being with divided attention attributed to working at home, in the same vein Mark and Smith (2018) noted that some lecturers' health were deteriorating to the extent where students could notice and point it out to the lectures. A case in point was a lecturer had to visit a General Physician due to requests from her students. Furthermore a study by Ubangari and Bako (2014) found out that value system determines how one responds to situations. This means that one person may value time with family and if they work a lot then they may be stressed out because they are not spending quality. On the other hand, there are those who value money over family time and may prefer working for longer hours to make more money as opposed to staying at home with their family.

4.3 Extra workload

The following excerpts emanated from this them:

You know of late the capitation in Universities from the Government has really dwindled, consequently the universities are not employing hence the workload has increased and you cannot complain since everyone has been assigned a minimum of five courses and some teach as many as seven in a semester with no extra pay. There is no place to air our grievances and it's even worse where we are reminded to keep on publishing or perish. So this usually leaves me wondering how one is supposed to do all these and yet be expected to be sane? Due to this, my health deteriorated and I got ulcers. I could not manage to go to class regularly and resorted to online classes as I could do them the comfort of my home where no one could see the tears in my eyes and pain in my heart. Unfortunately, when my immediate boss heard so many complaints from the students, he summoned me for lacking focus. I have tried taking several anti-depressants but they either seem to be too strong or too weak for me. I have thus resulted to smoking cigarettes and taking Velo which seem to give me temporary relief.

Francis, 38-year-old lecturer

Felix, on hard work and technology, reported the following:

Being the youngest in our department, did not serve me well as my colleagues would dump office work at me and tell me they did not understand how to use Technology. This led me to sleeping very late trying to finish work such as preparing graduations, typing minutes and preparing learning management system materials for my colleagues and I. This therefore made me sleep for three to four hours a night and one day I just collapsed while lecturing and after going to the local hospital, I discovered that I had high pressure and fatigue which impaired my ability to work for long hours. However, my boss keeps reminding me that I am their only hope in Technology despite my ill health. I cope by watching social media to forget my problems and focus my mind on other people for a while.

Felix, 30-year old Lecturer

Fiona on hard work and motherhood posited that:

I had just finished my maternity leave when I came back to the University and found so many changes, the departments were being merged and a lot of restructuring was happening in an effort to save cost as our University had a lot of debts. This led to many hours teaching as well as coordinating exams for my department, not forgetting, I had a three-month baby but no one cared about that. I tried to negotiate with my COD to at least relieve me from doing the exams responsibilities and he would remind me that my advancing depended on my ability to do other work assigned to me other than lecturing. Slowly by slowly I felt my body getting weaker, the work getting gigantic, my love for my son diminishing as I would not give him much time as I was constantly frustrated. I went to the hospital and it was then that I was diagnosed with Post-Partum Depression and I was lucky it was detected very fast before I could do anything crazy to myself or my son. My family especially my mum has been my greatest support system because I can talk to her anytime when I feel my anxiety levels going up.

Fiona: 38-year-old Lecturer

Faith posited that she miscarried because of work pressure from her boss as shown below:

I got pregnant while still a Tutorial fellow (TF) and my boss was not happy about it as in my University it is the TFs who do a lot of donkey work from invigilating for lecturers, marking, grading and classifying students for graduation. They do these because they know we are on contract and we need the job badly.

The sad thing is I tried explaining to him I could not make it to campus every day and he would hear none of it and said my leave had not started hence I was still supposed to report to work. I unfortunately miscarried on the seventh month and got into depression afterwards. This was my first time conceiving after trying for so long. I hate the fact that I still went to work even after I told him my condition was not good and more so I hate that I was desperate for advancing to lecturing position that I persevered despite my poor maternal health. Nowadays I cannot even stand seeing him as he reminds me of the loss and this has lessened my work productivity. I had to see a counsellor who did a lot of work in helping me with the grieving process.

Faith: 32-year-old Tutorial Fellow

From the excerpts above, we see that heavy workload greatly impairs on the ability of the lecturers to focus on their work. This is made worse by diseases as they cannot deliver in the classrooms further driving a wedge between them and their superior. This is in line with findings of Wadhwa and Bano (2020) who revealed that extra workload and lack of time often burden teachers and often lead to emotional and mental ill health. Similarly, Gul et al. (2021) noted that extra classes with no extra pay, departmental responsibilities and excess meetings are often a precursor to poor health of lecturers. Akune et al. (2022) also pointed out that occupational stress caused by working for long hours which is often caused by the publish or perish principle often cause depression, disease and general poor health of young lecturers in Nigeria because they are the ones most affected by work. Furthermore, a study by Ubangari and Bako (2014) in Nigeria found that the respondents complained that they had so much work to do ranging from teaching, attending many meetings, supervision of graduate students as well as peer reviewing papers which was a cause of stress considering the low pay. Additionally, Punch (2012) reported that in Nigerian Universities, the workload is too much leading to over reliance on part-time lectures which often times compromises the quality of work done as they are overburdened with courses and their pay is minimal.

4.4 Unconducive working environment

The following respondents had this to say concerning this theme:

My boss and I applied for the same job position of Deanship and by bad luck I lost to her and this created bad blood between us two as she would view me as a competitor. There is a day I applied for a sabbatical leave and she maliciously refused to let me go citing a lot of work was still going on in the school hence I was needed around. I was so downcast as I was hoping to do a lot during the sabbatical, I then started missing classes, feeling anxiety attacks every day I was supposed to go to school and losing my drive for work. Before long, the Dean summoned me to her office for failing to give my best in the work place and it was really exasperating. I honestly wish I could get a job elsewhere as I do not feel comfortable here working with her. My colleagues have avoided me because they think I am boring by being so aloof and distant both socially and academically.

Faraja, 54-year-old Professor

Feni revealed that she went through sexual advances from her superior as shown in the text below:

My COD who also doubles up as my Doctorate supervisor started making sexual advances at me. He would ask me to meet him in the office to discuss my academic work and would later start telling me how he loved me and wanted us to take it to a notch higher. When I refused the advances, he told me he would make my life a living hell in both work place and academia. I got into a catch 22 situation since I needed this job so much since I am the sole breadwinner at home. It was then that I decided to give in to secure the job and advance at my career. I felt horrible afterwards and I get panic attacks every day I go to work since the guilt is killing me inside. Word around has it that he does that to nearly all female staff in his department and every one fears reporting him as he is a well-connected man. Nowadays I keep to myself as I have ashamed and embarrassed by the ordeal and I am too to report since it was not a rape case.

Feni, 36-year-old lecturer

Fadhili revealed that he faced discrimination because of his ethnic background as shown in the text below:

In my University, many people are from a certain ethnic group and I unfortunately am from a different one hence getting promoted has not been easy. I have been in one position for nearly ten years and whenever I apply for promotion, somehow, my papers disappear and I never get a promotion yet many colleagues even those who were behind me have surpassed me. It is sad that there is no one to report to as all the big men are from the same ethnic group as my boss and would never listen to me. This has made me hate my job and I keep applying for jobs elsewhere and I hope on day I would be lucky and leave. It is demoralizing when every day you have to be surrounded by people who remind you that that is their home University and you are an outsider. To be sincere, it feels one feels socially excluded and unable to participate in social events such as promotion parties, birthdays, weddings etc.

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Fadhili: 47-year-old Senior Lecturer

The environment one works in can either make one love or hate their job. This could range from infrastructure to the people in the environment. This is supported by Areekuzhiyil (2014) who noted that a conducive working environment highly contributed to passion while working. Furthermore, Ahmad et al. (2022) espoused that having unhealthy relationships with colleagues can hinder one from working effectively as it is a great stressor. From this we can conclude that healthy work environment is highly related to high energy levels and passion for work while difficult colleagues make work ne exasperating. A similar study by Mark and Smith (2018) posited that many respondents are not stressed by the workload from the workplace because that is expected of them to perform but are stressed by communication and social interaction by colleagues. Where the interaction was good, the stress levels would be low and where the interactions were poor, then the respondents would dread working. They went ahead and explained that when the managers would involve the academic staff in decision making, the latter would feel appreciated and would work with minimal stress but when they were kept out of the loop they would develop anxiety and high stress levels.

4.5 Financial constraints

Finances affect many people and the academic staff is not spared either as shown in the excerpts below:

When the parallel program numbers began to dwindle, our University stopped remitting statutory deductions and loans and this hit us hard as banks would charge us penalties as they were not receiving money yet our University would faithfully deduct the monies but not remit to the banks. I dreaded going to work as I had nothing in the account. To make matters worse, my wife lost her job during the COVID-19 Pandemic and we were between a rock and a hard place. This got me into taking alcohol and drugs as I felt reduced to nothing as I could not fully provide for my family. I felt embarrassed calling myself a lecturer yet I could not even afford basic things. I find myself sending handouts to students since I have no drive for teaching. I usually find it difficult to borrow money from my colleagues since I do not want to appear broke and be the subject of gossip in campus.

Fatah: 48-year-old Lecturer

Filo similarly shared the sentiments of Fatah above by reporting the following:

I am currently paying an arm and a leg for my Doctorate among other family commitments considering I am the first born in my family. My parents thus expect me to pay school fees for my siblings since they are struggling financially and still have pocket money for them every month. To make matters worse, the government of Kenya has increased taxation on everything and I barely have money for myself. Many times this demoralizes me and I fear going to work since the bills are rising higher than the Income and people expect you to still be there for them without complaining. I cope by smoking bhang with my friends to forget my problems. Borrowing money is unsettling to me since me since all my colleagues who are my peers are doing well driving the latest vehicles and they cannot understand or relate to my woes. I am forced to borrow from mobile lending services where the interest rates are exorbitant and repayment time so small which again leads me into more financial constraints.

Filo: 30-year-old Tutorial Fellow

From the findings above, the study revealed that the lecturers were struggling to make ends meet owing to the fact that they either had a lot of loans, family commitments or the Universities were failing to remit their deductions to the banks, this study is similar to findings of a research study conducted by KIPPRA in 2013, lecturers in Kenyan public universities were poorly paid as compared to their counterparts in the East African region. The researchers also collected evidence in six public universities that showed that lecturers were getting lower salaries and allowances than their colleagues of other professionals and this had led to numerous industrial actions in the form of strikes from lecturers. In other private institutions, lecturers are often exploited by the owners of such institutions whose first objective is to make a profit from their businesses. Owners of these institutions often resort to various forms of exploitation such as paying meager salaries to the tutors, irregular payment of the salaries, expecting extra hours of work and for other employers, providing temporary tenure of employment for extended periods of time Afsana (2016). This little income vis-a vis many bills may therefore lead to depression if one does have other sources of income.

4.6 Delayed Promotion

This factor usually demoralizes staff because they get tired of being in the same position for so long. 14 out of 20 respondents attested to having been demoralized and Fabiano expressed the following sentiments:

I have been in the same position of a lecturer for 10 years and it is demoralizing not being able to progress in the academic ladder despite having the needed requirements to advance. When we ask the management they usually tell us that the University is not in a position to promote because of being cash strapped owing to many debts to suppliers. I hence find no joy in my work.

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Fabiano: 47-year-old Lecturer

Similarly, the sentiments were shared by Flora as evidenced below:

I have been on contract for the past eight years despite having made strides in my academic and professional life. The Dean keeps promising us promotions and adding us extra responsibilities but there is no permanent letter coming. I need the job but I am greatly demotivated since my survival here is at the mercy of the Dean and Human Resource Manager renewing my contract. How can I be passionate about my job yet am not sure of tomorrow?

Flora: 33-year-old Tutorial Fellow

From the data above, staff seem to be so demoralized having waited for promotions for a long time. A study by Meng and Wang (2018) corroborates this study because they found that delay in promotions affected one's emotionally as it affected salary, academic status and access to research resources in the University. Gul *et al.* (2022) also opined that lack of promotion causes a lot of stress to lecturers. In the same vein, Ahmad *et al.* revealed that contractual jobs lessened the moral of staff as they felt that they could be kicked out of the job anytime. This made them not feel secure in an institution that was also not secure with employing them on permanent basis. In addition, Akinboye (2002) reported that the causes of stress among lecturers included poor management, bullying, long workers and redundancies caused by low turnout of students. This then suggests that when all these factors are in place, an employee will not be secure and satisfied about their job.

4.7 Stigma

Stigma deals with misunderstanding and misjudging people with mental health conditions. It can be done by other people and sometimes even by the very people themselves when they feel inadequate and embarrassed by their condition. It affects how one works because if a person perceives that they will be treated negatively by colleagues because they are mentally sick, then they may be anxious, withdrawn and fear speaking about their condition. This in turn may affect their productivity as expressed by the respondent below:

I have had Bi- Polar condition and my moods usually fluctuate regularly. However, I fear disclosing this to my bosses because of the stigma mental health has in the society. I thus try so much to be self-aware so that I do not lose my temper inadvertently and cause a bad scene when I am annoyed by students.

Fayol: 59-year-old Professor

A similar opinion is reported by a respondent as shown in the text below

When I got employed I was as healthy as they come but after undergoing delayed promotion I got diagnosed with panic disorder and to date, I still take anti-anxiety medicines. What I fear is disclosing to my colleagues about my conditions as I fear being ridiculed, gossiped about or losing my job because of low productivity on days when I feel anxious and cannot go to work. To be honest I do not think my bosses have the needed empathy for people like me.

Fidelis: 46-year-old Lecturer

From the data above, stigma can be both a cause and effect of mental health conditions and many people fear embarrassment as they believe their colleagues will see them as less human beings who are unable to manage their mental and emotional well-being. This in turn has an impact on one's self worth and where one has low self-esteem, then the stigma can greatly hurt them. A similar study was done by Smith *et al.* (2022) on mental health of faculty members in Canada where they interviewed nine respondents and they found that the ecological system determines one's productivity because where the colleagues and bosses are empathetic and caring, one is likely to feel accepted and give their best in teaching, research and office work. However, where the staff feel embarrassed misunderstood, they are likely to retreat which in turn affects their productivity. Moreover, Chaudoir *et al.* (2013) opined that the non-obvious nature of mental health conditions may lead to some people being too quiet to avoid being socially discredited.

4.8 CONCLUSION

Although awareness of lecturers' mental health is growing, more could be done to alleviate mental health challenges and support those who are struggling. The dominant narrative is that we must monitor and improve lecturers' mental health and wellbeing because it may affect students' mental health and wellbeing. To alleviate faculty stress, systemic changes are required in addition to individual stress interventions at the worker level. Lecturers need emotional support, mental health resources, and positive interactions with management and Council. Because the working climate affects everyone in the school, more training should be provided to the leadership team.

5. RECOMMENDATION

From the literature and results obtained, the study suggests the following measures to reduce mental health conditions as well as stigma

1. The Universities to have counselling services for staff as well as mental health seminars on a regular basis where sensitization by counsellors, psychiatrists and faith leaders can be done on mental health.
2. To reduce the workload of the lecturers to manageable levels and also employ more administrators who will do the administrative work often done by lecturers.
3. To compensate lecturers for extra work done so that it acts as a motivator hence reduce stress levels.
4. To have regular team building where the lecturers get to know each other, reduce tension and promote unity.
5. To pay lecturers their dues on the recommended dates and not to withhold their bank remittances as finance is a major cause of stress for many people.
6. To promote lecturers on regular basis when they qualify so as to reduce the stress levels caused by being stuck in one position.
7. To train the management on ways of motivating employees as well as understanding the different personalities that the employees may have to enhance cooperation and inclusivity. Some management bosses get positions on academic merit on not on training of Human Resource hence may not have the necessary understanding of different types of people's behaviour and how to deal with them.
8. To have gym facilities for staff where they can exercise, burn calories and forget their problems since exercise releases endorphins which are good feeling hormones.

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