

AN ASSESSMENT OF COMPUTER RELATED STRESS AT
THEWORKPLACE A T JOMORO DISTRICT ASSEMBLY
OF THE WESTERN REGION OF GHANA

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ABSTRACT

This study sort to determine how the use of computers and its related technologies stresses the administrative staffs of the Jomoro district assembly. It is also to explore how these computer related stress is managed by the managers of Jomoro district assembly. A total of 85 administrative staffs were randomly sampled for the study. A well-structured questionnaire was used for collecting data. Frequencies, percentages, means, standard deviations were used to analyse the data collected. It was established from the study that the administrative staffs work with the computer over 6 hours a day as result suffer from headaches and backache. An excessive heat and or poor/inadequate lighting in the district assembly's building affects the administrative workers. This in turn affects their eyesight's when they continue to use the computers. Though managers of the district assembly have been informed of the computer related stress affecting their work, management have not made any effort to solve these computer related stressors. Considering the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, it was recommended that there should be more health breaks for the administrative workers who use the computer over 6 hours a day and more ventilation and lighting systems must be provided in the district assembly building to help save the eye sight and the general well-being of the administrative workers who constantly use the computer. Finally management must act on all the computer related stress that are reported by the workers and they must be involved in its solutions.

Keywords: Administrative staff , Computer, Jomoro district assembly, Managers, Stress, Workplace

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Introduction

In this modern world, computers are valuable machines that modern offices can't do without them. Yet, working with computers can sometimes be stressful. Computers have become a way of life. There are few people who don't use computers and its related technologies these days. They are found everywhere in our life today. They are found in our workplaces, offices, schools, libraries, cafes, trains etc. Even our communication is by the computer, our work is by the computer and family life is by the computer. This means that since we are spending more time on the computers we are therefore more affected by the ups and downs that they may cause us.

For the younger generation using computers is like walking or speaking. They know how to use them, breathe them and fix them. This is because they have used them from an early age. But for some of the older generation it is not so easy to get the hang of computers (Stress-Relief-Choices.com, 2013). There is an expectation, oftentimes self-imposed. This is because they see the ease with which a lot of people use computers. Many novice computer users, sometimes feel reluctant to ask other people for help when they need help. This can lead to an incredible amount of stress. This stress can get them angry, frustrated, or impatient with the computer from time to time.

Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined stress as a particular relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as tasking or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being. Stress at work is seen as one of the major psychosocial risks of work. Work-related stress is one of the problems confronting employees. It is of great concern to employees, employers and psychologists, because of its high growing rate in ill-health, as a result of long working hours of some employees. In reference to work-related stress, European commission (2000) defines stress as the emotional, cognitive, behavioural and psychological reaction to aversive and anxious aspects of work, work environments and work organizations.

According to Agolla&Ongori (2009), in recent years, "stress has become an important topic in academic circle" probably because of the fact that life in general is flooded by many stresses. Among civil servants, stress can be viewed as a positive or negative experience that affects their lives and performances. This is so because "office work is never without stressful activities". The experience of stress among civil servants is considered normal

but “if stress is severe and/or prolonged, it can reduce performance; interfere with a staff’s ability to participate in and contribute to work life; and increase the likelihood of substance abuse and other potentially damaging behaviours” (Richlin-Klonsky& Hoe, 2003).

The Jomoro district assembly which is under study is one of the district assemblies providing quality services to the people of Jomoro. Almost every office in the Jomoro district assembly has a computer or its related equipment. Most jobs require the use of computers nowadays so there is not much option of not using the computer. Meanwhile, most of the older administrative staffs are BBC (“Born before Computer” – a term loosely used in Ghana to describe someone who is a greenhorn in using the computer or its related technologies and or completed secondary school or any higher institution before computers were widely introduced in schools.)

Purpose of the Study

The Jomoro district assembly had only manual type writers when it was created in 1988. But with modern computers and its related technology introduced in almost all the offices in the district, administrative workers would have to adjust themselves to this new technology. This in turn brings anxiety and stress on the administrative workers. Therefore, the purpose of this study was to determine how administrative staffs are stressed by the use of computers and its related technologies in the Jomoro district assembly. It is also to explore how these computer related stress is being managed by the managers of Jomoro district assembly.

Research Question

The Study seeks to find answers to the following;

1. How the use of computers and its related technologies do stresses administrative staffs of Jomoro District Assembly?
2. How are managers of the district assembly managing computer related stress in the workplace?

Significance of the Study

This study would serve as an additional knowledge to the general public for those who are interested in stress management. It would also serve as additional literature to professionals who are embarking on stress management. Finally, it would also serve as a policy directive for Jomoro district assembly to enhance their working relationship and stress management.

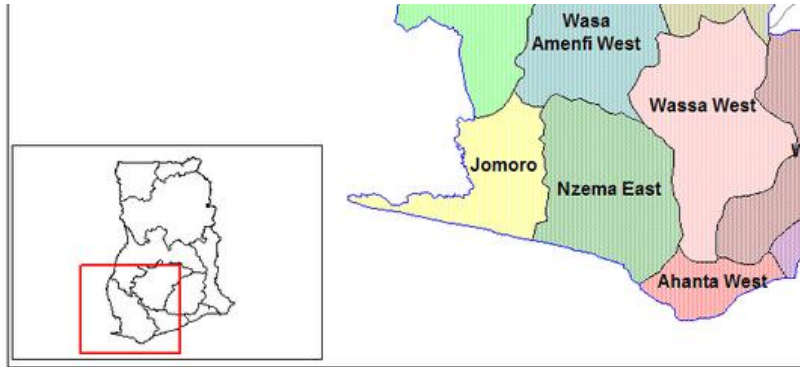
Limitations of Study

As in other empirical studies, this study is not without its limitations. The sample consisted of Jomoro district assembly and this may limit the generalization of the results. This study can be strengthened by increasing the sample size by including other districts, municipal or metropolitan assemblies as the data analysis results and findings may vary substantially. Also the workplace environment of Jomoro district assembly may not represent the whole country. So the results of this study are only applicable to the Jomoro district Assembly of the western region of Ghana.

BACKGROUND OF THE STUDY AREA

The Jomoro District Assembly

The Jomoro District Assembly was established in 1988 by a Legislative Instrument (LI) 1394. The District Assembly is made up of 52 members comprising 34 elected Assembly Members, 16 Government Appointees. One (1) District Chief Executive (DCE) and 1 Member of Parliament. The District Assembly has 10 Area Councils, namely, Half Assini Area Council, Gwenye Area Council, Takinta Area Council, New Town Area Council, Bonyere Area Council, Mpataba Area Council, Beyin Area Council, Tikobo No.1 Area Council, Tikobo No.2 Area Council, and Elubo Area Council.



Location and Size

The District covers an area of 1,344 sq. km. This is about 5.6% of the total area of the Western Region. The district lies between Latitude $04^{\circ}55'$ – $05^{\circ}15'N$ and Longitude $02^{\circ}15'$ – $02^{\circ}45'W$ and is bordered on the North by Wasswa Amenfi West and AowinSuaman Districts, Ellembele District to the East, La Côte d'Ivoire to the West and Gulf of Guinea to the South. It is the westernmost district on the coast of Ghana.

Population

The District has a population of 150,107 with a density of 83 persons per km sq and annual growth rate of 2% (according to 2010 population and housing census). The total number of settlement is 931 and the district capital is Half Assini.

REVIEW OF RELATED LITERATURE

According to Selye (1976) stress is defined as the condition that can give rise to psychologically felt stress or discomfort and psychological state itself. He goes further to say that stress is the sum of all non-specific effects of factors that can act upon the body. People feel little stress when they have the time, experience and resource to manage a situation. They feel great stress when they think they cannot handle the demands put upon them. Stress is therefore a negative experience and it is not an inevitable consequence of an event. It depends a lot on people perceptions of a situation and their real ability to cope with it. However, Barden (2001) is of the view that stress is not necessarily something bad. It all depends on how a person takes it. The stress of exhilarating, creative, successful work is beneficial and that of fail, humiliation or infection is experienced irrespective of whether the situation was positive or negative. Stress is

now viewed as a bad thing with a range of harmful biochemical and long term effects. These effects have rarely been observed in positive situations.

Harrold and Wayland (2002) considers that the relationship between satisfaction and productivity is reciprocal. It is not, thus, satisfaction that leads to productivity, but productivity that leads to satisfaction. Satisfaction affects productivity mainly in an indirect way, creating a feeling of dedication towards the organisation and its targets. Beyond this relationship of productivity-satisfaction-productivity, it is possible to have a secondary increase of satisfaction, provided that productivity results in the increase of other remunerations related to work (promotion, authority, bonus, etc) that contribute to the increase of satisfaction.

According to Robert and Lussier (1988) very unfavourable and unproductive organizational relationships are potential causes of stress conditions. In some organizations, there is a complete lack of information, little effective consultation and a secession process. This is so much office politics which places restrictions on colleagues' officers. They further said that some officers undertake schedules of work which are too much for the individual. In an education institute at the tertiary level, an officer undertakes to be the Vice Principal, Secretary to the Administrative Board, Deans of School and head of Department. No wonder this gentleman falls sick intermittently. What is worst is that he does not seem to impress anybody with his or her quality of work.

McGinty (2007) concluded in a research conducted that the stress in the workplace reduces productivity, increases management pressures, and makes people ill in many ways. Evidence shows that the problem is increasing. Stress levels rocketed in 2005 - all around the world, whether economic activity was picking up or slowing down (Amble, 2006).

Several studies have highlighted the deleterious consequences of high workloads or work overload. According to Wilkes et al. (1998) work overloads and time constraints were significant contributors to work stress among community nurses. Workload stress can be defined as reluctance to come to work and a feeling of constant pressure accompanied by the general physiological, psychological, and behavioural stress symptoms.

Hendy et al. (2001) pointed out that time pressure is the underlying stressor that determines

Operator performance, error production, and judgment of workload. The time pressure and task demand are the operating conditions that influence operators subjectively and objectively.

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

A descriptive survey was used for this study. This type of survey attempts to provide an accurate and objective description of a picture of an on-going situation or real life situation (Quartey&Awoyemi, 2002).According to Uma & Roger (2009) the population refers to the entire group of people, events, or things of interest that the researcher wishes to investigate. For this reason, the target population for the study was all administrative Staff of the Jomoro district assembly.The Simple random sampling technique was used to select a sample size of 85out of the 102 administrative staffsfor the study.

Tool for Data Collection

The main instrument used in gathering data wasthe questionnaire developed by the researcher after an intensive literature review. Items in the questionnaire were mostly “close-ended”. The questionnaire was in two sections. Section “A” solicited for respondents’ demographic information while Section “B” sought information on administrative staff’s cause of work related stress and the extent of stress in relation to the use of computers.

The data collected were analysed by using IBM Statistical Product and Service Solutions (IBM SPSS version 20). Frequencies, percentages, means and standard deviations were used to describe the data.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION OF THE STUDY

Research Question 1: How the use of computers and its related technologies do stresses administrative staffs of Jomoro District Assembly?

The number of hours respondents spent using the computer at the workplace was investigated. The result is summarized in Table 1.

Table 1: HoursSpent using Computers at the Workplace.

N	Minimum	Maximum	Mean	Std. Deviation
85	6	9	8.33	.802

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 1, it can be observed that on the average the respondents spend between 6 and 9 hours at the workplace with a standard deviation of 0 .802. This indication is in line with working hours of government workers, since everyone is expected to work for 8 hours for most government jobs. The minimum hours spent at the workplace was recorded as 6 and the maximum 9.

The effect of sitting behind the computer for over 6 hours was also investigated. The respondents were asked to indicate whether they have suffered from some health conditions after their daily work schedule of using the computer. Table 2 present the findings.

Table 2: Effect of Using the Computer over 6 hours a Day at the Workplace

	N	%
Headaches	21	29.6%
Backache	21	29.6%
Neck Ache	13	18.3%
Sleeplessness	8	11.3%
Anxiety	2	2.8%
Chest Pain/ Palpitations	2	2.8%
Indigestion/Nausea	2	2.8%
Irritability	2	2.8%
Total	71	100.0%

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 2, a total of 71 responses were obtained from the respondents. Of the responses, 21 representing 29.6% suffer from headaches and backache respectively. Again, 2 responses representing 2.8% suffer from anxiety, chest pain, indigestion and irritability respectively. However 14 of the respondents did not respond to the questionnaire items.

The respondents were also asked to indicate whether some environmental issues cause problems during their daily work schedule when they are using the computer. Table 3 present the findings.

Table 3: Some Environmental Problems at work

Some Stressors	N	%
Excessive Heat	24	28.2%
Poor/Inadequate Lighting	20	23.5%
Poor Ventilation	15	17.6%
Poor Maintenance of Equipment	14	16.5%
Dust/Fumes	6	7.1%
Noise	3	3.5%
Overcrowding	3	3.5%
Total	85	100.0%

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 3, 24 representing 28.2% claimed Excessive Heat was their concern while Poor/Inadequate Lighting was another concern expressed by the respondents when they are working with their computers. This is represented by 23.5% of the respondents. However, 3 responses representing 3.5% indicated that noise and overcrowding was a concern to them.

The respondents were again asked to indicate whether certain events or situations that stresses them on their daily work schedule while using the computer. The result is presented in Table 4.

Table 4: Some Problematic Situation at Work

Problems	N	%
Repetitive/ Boring	5	5.9
Very Heavy Work Load	27	31.8
Inadequate Break Times/ Meal Times	13	15.3
Unfair Distribution of Work	6	7.1
Job Insecurity	5	5.9
Meeting Deadlines	28	32.9
Unsocial Hours	1	1.2
Total	85	100

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 4, 28 representing 32.9% of the administrative staff indicated that meeting deadlines of giving work was a problem for them. Thus it stresses them out. Also, 27 representing 31.8% complained that very heavy workload to work with the computer also stresses them out. Only 1 response representing 1.2% indicated that they normally work after normal work time. That during brake time or after work.

Research Question 2: How are managers of the district assembly managing computer related stress in the workplace?

The part of the analysis would look at ways of managing stress at workplace. The way managers deals with workplace stress can affect workers output either negatively or positively. The administrative staff's taking part in the study were asked to indicate whether they have drawn management attention to the computer related stress affecting their work output. The responses are summarized in Table 5.

Table 5: Management Awareness or not of Computer Related Stress

Response	Frequency	%
Yes	55	64.7
No	30	35.3
Total	85	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 5, 55 respondents representing 64.7% have drawn the attention of management on stress problems, while 35.3% have not. This shows that majority of the respondents have drawn the attention of the management on stress problems. This indicating that management is aware of computer related stress in the district Assembly.

Information was elicited about whether management takes the complaints of the respondents seriously, and whether they act on them. This has been shown in Table 6

Table 6: Distribution showing whether management make any effort to solve stress problems

	Frequency	%
Yes	18	32.7
No	37	67.3
Total	85	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 6, out of the 55 respondents who have drawn the attention of the management on the computer related stress problems in the workplace (See Table 5), 37 representing 67.3% indicated that management of the assembly have not made any effort to solve stress problems, while 18 representing 32.7% said otherwise.

To further information was elicited from those who said management is dealing with the computer related stress problems. They were made to indicate whether they are actually satisfied with management interventions. This is shown in Table 7

Table 7: Distribution showing whether Administrative Staffs are satisfied with Measures management took in solving stress problem?

	Frequency	%
Yes	7	38.9
No	11	61.1
Total	18	100.0

Source: Field Work, 2014

From Table 7, out of the 18 respondents who indicated that the management of the assembly have made some effort to solve stress problem, 11 of them representing 61.1% indicated that they were not satisfied with the measures management took in solving stress problem while 7 representing 38.8% said they are actually satisfied with measures being put in place to solve computer related stress at the workplace.

Discussions of Results

From the study it came out that the assembly's administrative staff spend on the average between 6 and 9 hours which is in line with working hours of government workers, since everyone is expected to work for 8 hours for most government jobs. The effect of sitting behind the computer for over 6 hours was also investigated. It came out from the study that, majority of the administrative staffs' of the assembly suffer from headaches and backache after using the computer for such a long time. These problems affect work output in the assembly.

Excessive Heat and Poor/Inadequate Lighting in the district assembly's building was a major concern to the administrative workers. Excessive heat can breakdown the computers and it can as well affect their health too. In the same manner, poor or inadequate lighting in the district assembly building can affect their eye sight in the long term when they continually use the computer. Providing an adequate lights can help diffuse most the light coming from the computer's monitor. Most often meeting deadlines of giving work leads to a stressful situations. They come under pressure when their managers force them to finish a giving task in a record finish time vis- a- vis the heavy workload to work with on the computer. Computer related stress needs to be managed well since if not well managed can affect the health and life style of the workers.

This study revealed that majority of the administrative workers have drawn the attention of management on the computer related stress affecting their work, yet management of the district assembly have not made any effort to solve these computer related stress problems affecting their work output. The few administrative workers who believe management of the assembly have made some effort to solve these computer related stress problem in their workplace are not satisfied with the measures management took in addressing their problems.

Conclusions

From the findings of the study, a number of conclusions could be drawn. Working with the computer over 6 hours a day affected most of the administrative staffs' of the district assembly by way of headaches and backache. An excessive heat and or poor/inadequate lighting in the district assembly's building was a major concern to the administrative workers. Since this can affect their eye when they continue to use the computers. The administrative workers are given heavy workloads to complete in unrealistic time. Their managers forget that they use

computers which sometimes break down due to excessive heat in the office. Though managers of the assembly have been informed of the computer related stress affecting their work, yet management of the district assembly have not made any effort to solve these computer related stress problems affecting their work output. Computer related stress needs to be managed well since if not well managed can affect the health and life style of the workers.

Recommendations

Considering the findings and conclusions drawn from this study, the following recommendations are made to the management of Jomoro district assembly:

1. There should be more health breaks for the administrative workers who use the computer over 6 hours a day
2. More ventilation and lighting systems must be provided in the district assembly building to help save the eye sight and the general well-being of the administrative workers who constantly use the computer.
3. The workload of the administrative workers who use the computer must be aligned with the time they are supposed to finish the work.
4. Management must act on all the computer related stress that are reported by the workers and they must be involved in its solutions.

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