Post Covid-19 Assessment of Burnout Syndrome among University Lecturers in a State University in Nigeria: A Case Study

[1]Oladipo, S. E.; [1]Owoyele, J. W., [1]Adeoye, M. A., [2]Adediran, Y.O., & [3]Adelaja, O. A.

[1]Department of Counselling Psychology and Educational Foundations, Tai Solarin University of Education, P.M.B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode.
[2]Deparment of Sociological Studies, Tai Solarin University of Education, P.M.B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode.
[3]Directorate of Academic Planning and Quality Assurance, Tai Solarin University of Education, P.M.B. 2118, Ijebu-Ode.
Corresponding Author: oladipo@tasued.edu.ng

ABSTRACT: Present realities among universities academics in attest to the fact that significant number of them are experiencing burnout syndrome, with very serious damaging impacts on their health, sometimes leading to death and having ripple effects on students' educational performance and overall well-being. This paper therefore, presents descriptive survey which was conducted to investigate burnout among lecturers and to know the predictive strength of age and gender on burnout among study participants. Participants were 162 conveniently sampled university lecturers, from a State university in southwestern Nigeria. They responded to the re-validated version of Copenhagen burnout inventory that was used for data collection and had Alpha reliability co-efficients of .80; .78 and .83 for personal,work and students' burnout respectively. Data collected over the period of three weeks were analysed, and the results indicating 109 (67.2%) male and 53 (32.7%) female; 129 (79.6%) Christians and 33 (20.4%) Muslims; 155 (95.7%) respondents were married, while 7(4.3%) were widow/widower; 123 (75.9%) respondents possessed PhD and 39(24.1%) had Master's degree. Participants' age ranged between 30 - 68 years. Result of hypotheses tested indicated that burnout syndrome was prevalent among participants, however, gender and age did not significantly predict burnout among lecturers. It was concluded that male and female lecturers are experiencing burnout syndrome and the earlier the university management intervenes to reduce stress among the lecturers the better. It is recommended among other things that lecturers should also endeavour to pay attention to themselves and device appropriate coping mechanisms to be able to manage stress and avoid burnout.

KEYWORDS: Covid-19, burnout, university, lecturer, Nigeria.

1. INTRODUCTION

Present day realities attest to the fact that the problem of burnout is more common than it is believed, with a very obvious influence on lecturers as well as the society at large. The older lecturers, seemed to be more affected because literature affirm that they manifested high rates of burnout, with such symptoms as: psychosomatic and psychovegetative disorders, economy of emotions and experience of psycho-traumatic events (Tatiana &Tatiana 2021). With the current global revolution in information technology, knowledge, demand for quality teaching and learning, academics, especially in developing countries like Nigeria are experiencing more pressure to develop themselves to live up to the demands.

Apart from impacting knowledge, the daily job-demands of a lecturer also includes guiding and deliberately exposing students to different learning opportunities. These very important roles of lecturers have necessitated an increased demand for qualified teachers who can provide the future generation with quality education in a technology-driven environment. Literature assert that younger academics are more likely to show signs of burnout when compared with older ones and that when lecturers have burnout syndrome it has consequences on the educational performance and overall well-being of students (Schwab, 1995 and Maslach & Leiter, 1995).

Burnout as a psychological syndrome is characterised by lack of ability to cope with emotional stress at work (Tatiana and Tatian, 2021). It also refers to the unenthusiastic and unsatisfactory emotional experience by workers after being exhausted at work due to inevitable pressure of work demands (Fangyu and Kaidan, 2021). It is a multi-dimentional syndrome that exists within human service professionals who provide services that entail frequent interaction with and among people e.g. Medical Doctors, Nurses, Pharmacists; education service providers like teachers at all levels of education: from nursery school, primary, secondary to tertiary education.

Burnout comprises mainly of three symptoms of emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and low sense of personal achievement (Madigan and Curran, 2020). Emotional exhaustion manifests as loss of enthusiasm for work, while depersonalisation manifests as being in a state of insensitivity and low sense of personal achievement, a negative evaluations of one's work value and worth (Leiter and Maslach, 2017). Ugwu, Onyishi and Tyoyima, (2013) expressed burnout as a negative work-related state of mind characterized by work fatigue, a sense of loss of accomplishment and loss of morale whereby rigor and dedication are lacking, which leads to long term effect of work tension resulting from repeated exposure to stressful activities.

Burnout is a state of emotional, mental, and physical exhaustion that is caused by excessive prolonged stress. Physical exhaustion refers to the depletion or draining of emotional resources, from which cynicism stems and cynicism refers to the indifference or distant attitude towards work, which invariably negatively impacts on the level of productivity of the individual workers and more importantly on their physical health and psychological well-being. Occupational burnout is mostly found within the human service professions, significant among whom are university lecturers (Syed and Nazir 2013), partly due to the very stressful environment, emotional involvement and outcomes that may be independent of the efforts exerted by the individual employees.

Burnout does not only affect social relationships and attitudes which make interactions difficult both at home and at work (either because of the social withdrawal of the burned-out person or of making him more prone to conflict), but it may also lead to general health problem which if not adequately attended to can lead to complications that may result to death. Burnout potentially impairs personal and professional competence and compromises productivity. Aversive emotional experience has been most comprehensively encapsulated by the phenomenon of burnout, which is particularly prominent among university lecturers. Reactions to burnout have been identified as tripartite: namely, depletion of emotional reserves (*emotional exhaustion*), increasingly cynical and

negative approach towards others (*depersonalisation*) and a growing feeling of work-related dissatisfaction (*personal accomplishment*).

Over the last few years, burnout has become a very prominent word particularly among university lecturers who seem to be hard hit by it (Syed and Nazir 2013) irrespective of their affiliation, either State or Federal institution. As a matter of fact, recent experiences among academics as it relates to burnout demand very urgent attention, because it does not only affect the welfare of its victims, but also those of family members and relatives. However, burnout can be adequately managed if prompt and timely attention is given to it. Although, the experience has been that its victims realise too late before they start acting and in some cases remediation seems impossible.

Many lecturers have had unprecedented attacks on their health which they have been battling with little or no success yet, some have been confined to wheel-chairs, others are confined to the hospital bed, some who are back in office are no longer their usual self because of the effect of burnout on them and there are those who have not been so fortunate to survive. Unfortunately, the level of productivity of victims of burnout who are able to return to work would have dropped significantly and it may not be possible to lay them off their jobs, at the same time, employment of new staff for replacement may not be possible for financial reasons. Yet all these could have been avoided or prevented if adequate precautionary measures had been taken as and when necessary.

The urgency of the study of burnout syndrome post covid-19 can be said to have been premised on the report of the numerous negative impacts that burnout can have on anybody who falls victim, e.g. an individual's mental health can be affected by burnout, as well as cause physical illnesses or depressive disorders (Al-Hagery; Alfaozan; Alghofaily, and Hadwan, 2020), it can also negatively influence personal motivation, productivity and well-being of people (Tatiana and Tatiana, 2021).

In furtherance, teaching as a service providing and emotional profession within the present reality across the globe, is one of the most stressful occupations (Tatiana and Tatiana, 2021) especially in developing countries like Nigeria where university lecturers have had to embark on long and incessant industrial actions to express their dissatisfaction and frustrations with different aspects of the education system that have been stressful to them, for example, low salary and professional status; unfavourable conditions of service; inadequate and or outdated laboratory equipment to facilitate teaching and learning; students' misbehaviour. Compared to other specialists, lecturers also have great daily emotional demands at work. Job stress and possible low job satisfaction may cause emotional and physical exhaustion, which may lead to the manifestation of negative teaching behaviour and invariably reduce the feeling of personal accomplishment. These are experiences which most probably have contributed to the brain drain that higher education in Nigeria has been experiencing in the most recent times, a situation that demands an urgent attention.

In the university, lecturer-burnout can result in lecturers' low organisational commitment, higher turnover rate, absenteeism, diminishing efficiency, low-spirit, and reduced human tendencies. Its effects on workforce can lead to reduction in the performance of lecturers as it could negatively impact on their physical and mental well-being, thereby increasing the rate of physical degeneration in their health, increase in medical cost in situations whereby their institution is not responsible for medical bills and at the long-run result to job dissatisfaction (Yamani, Shahabi & Haghani 2014). Fernandez-Suarez, et al., (2021) and Vipene and Okirigwe (2021) reported in different studies that that lecturers' burnout is gender related such that the female lecturers are more at risk than their male counterpart. In another study, Leiter, Bakker and Maslach (2014), reported a positive relationship between years of experience and burnout among university lecturers, such that less experienced lecturers have high risk of burnout as compared to the experienced ones.

Lecturer-burnout is a subtle pressure experienced by many lecturers regardless of the societal settings, faculty or department, as a result of work pressure, excess workload, and extensive work hours. Post-covid-19 induced increased work demands for university lecturers, (especially online teaching), research, publication, and engagement in administrative duties in some cases, and a loss of control due to a lack of resources, a circumstance that substantially favours the development of burnout. Furthermore, as a result of lethargy on the part of some lecturers, their students suffer unpleasing actions and in-action, no room for effective teaching and learning due to poor and inadequate facilities, scarcity of academic books and journals, declined standard of education, all these because lecturers are not stable in performing their duties of teaching, research and community development (Vipene and Okirigwe, 2021)

In the bid to ameliorate the problem of burnout among university lecturers, thereby improving their job-satisfaction, satisfaction with life and psychological well-being, this study investigated the level of burnout among academic staff of a State university in southwestern Nigeria with the hope of being able to ascertain the level of burnout and gender difference among lecturers in terms of burnout, with the hope of being able to profer practicable coping or intervention strategies for victims.

Without doubt, the organizational commitment as well as productivity level of lecturers who experience burnout automatically drops, they become more of a clog in the wheel than motivators, thus invariably become de-motivators, a situation that is not in the interest of the university where they work. It is therefore better to avoid and or quickly attend to burnout once it is noticed and should not be allowed to degenerate to the stage of negatively affecting morale and work behaviour.

A review of related literature suggests that many of the available literature on burnout the education sector focused on primary and secondary schools. However, a new education reality is emerging mainly because of the impact of globalization, thereby, extending the concern about burnout and its consequences to higher education level as well. No doubt, globalisation and its impacts have ushered in an upsurge in lecturers' work responsibilities, due to high

demands for online teaching, research publication and a loss of control because of inadequate or lack of resources, a situation that significantly favours the development of burnout syndrome.

In addition to the demands previously highlighted, e-teaching and learning has become prioritised owing to the COVID-19 pandemic, which has introduced some sort of new psycho-social stress factors, e.g. feelings of technological inefficiency, isolation, lack of training, and or difficulty of maintaining work-life balance (Rapanta, et al. 2020). Some of the available studies on burnout (especially of lecturers) do not provide consistent data. While authors such as Lackritz, (2004) and Amir, (2020), reported that high level of burnout is more prominent among professors in the universities (20% and 40% respectively), Herranz-Bellido, et al. (2006) and Plamer et al.(2016) on the other hand reported low prevalence of burnout among university lecturers (1.8% and 2.6% respectively). in respect of the dimensions of burnout, literature established that de-personalisation and high levels of emotional exhaustion constitute the core of this syndrome. In a study that involved 235 professors, Marenco and Avila (2016), established that the main impact of burnout among professors was reduced personal accomplishment, whereas de-personalization contributed least to the appearance of this syndrome among the sample. Thus, different factors are associated with the different dimensions of burnout, some of which are personal, while others are organizational.

Significantly, gender has been identified as a predictor of emotional exhaustion, with women reporting higher scores (Watts and Robertson, 2011); on the other hand, age and years of experience on the job have been found to be inversely related to Burnout. Soria-Oliver, et.al.(2019) have reported that the pressure on lecturers to adopt the use of information and communication technologies (ICT) for teaching, couple with administrative duties combined with research and publications have increased the experience of burnout syndrome among university lecturers.

Talking about de-personalisation dimension, Otero, (2008) reported a lack of emotional support and low optimism, it was specifically reported that there were proves that; support from friends and family are relevant explanatory variables, not only for de-personalisation but also for the other two dimensions. Self-efficacy beliefs also had similar results which are strongly associated with burnout and its dimensions. In a related study however, Kuimova et al. (2016) identified low salary and wages as one of the variables related to burnout, with other important factors being psycho-social risk factors derived from the use of ICT in education, problem of work-family balance and digital illiteracy {Garcıa-Gonzalez, et al, (2020); Ozg¨ur, (2020) and Schildkamp, et al. (2020) }. Above all, COVID-19 pandemic has changed the narrative within the education sector with the near cancellation of physical face-to-face classes (replaced with virtual classes) which many teachers are yet to adjust to because of their deficiency and feelings of technological incompetence (Li and Wang, 2020).

Till date, very few indigenous studies exist in terms of investigating burnout among university lecturers in Nigeria and those available did not consider gender factor of, neither did they investigate the most prominent of the dimensions of burnout among lecturers. In other words, not many research works are available in this area, thus, creating a gap in literature that needs be filled. The purpose of this present study was to evaluate the level of burnout

of university lecturers using a state university in the southwestern part of Nigeria and to ascertain the main influence of gender on lecturers' burnout in order to be able to make recommendation (post pandemic) towards alleviating the problem of burnout and its impact on university lecturers, with the hope of improving their well-being and life-satisfaction.

2. HYPOTHESES

Two hypotheses were stated for the study

1. Gender will not significantly predict burnout syndrome among university lecturers.
2. Age will not significantly predict burnout syndrome among university lecturers.

3. RESEARCH QUESTIONS

Two research questions were asked in the study.

1. What is the level of burnout among lecturers?
2. Will staff status determine lecturers' level of burnout?

4. METHODS

This was a descriptive survey research and the participants were the lecturers of a State university in one of the southwestern states of Nigeria. Using purposive and convenient sampling methods, 162 lecturers were conveniently sampled from the population of academic staff in the university. The 19-item, self-rating, 4 response likert format Copenhagen Burnout Inventory (Copenhagen, 1999) was adapted for use in the study. The original inventory had three components which were meant to assess an individual's level of personal, work and students' burnout. The scale had alpha reliability co-efficients of .80 for personal burnout; .78 for work burnout and .83 for students' burnout respectively.

However, the inventory was re-validated before use in this study. The modified version of the scale yielded 13-items and alpha reliability co-efficient of .90 for personal burnout, .93 work burnout and .94 for students' burnout respectively. Mean score and above are regarded as high burnout, while scores below the mean are regarded as low burnout. Data collection was done over a period of three weeks. The research instrument was redesigned into google form and administered online to academic staff of the selected university who consented to participate in the study. At the end of three weeks, 162 responses were gathered and analysed.

5. RESULTS

Descriptive statistics: classification of respondents according to sex distribution showed 109 (67.2%) male and 53 (32.7%) female. With respect to religious affiliation, 129 (79.6%) were Christians and 33 (20.4%) were muslims. In all, a total of 155 (95.7%) respondents indicated that they were married, while 7 (4.3%) were widow/widower. Classification according to highest academic qualification revealed that 123 (75.9%) respondents possessed PhD, while 39 (24.1%) respondents possessed master's degree. Participants' age ranged between 30 - 68 years.

The first hypothesis that stated that gender will not significant predict burnout among staff was tested using t-test for independent samples to compare the means of the two groups, the result is presented in Table 1.

Table 1: Showing the summary of t-test for independent samples showing comparison of burnout among Male and Female university lecturers.

	Gender	n	mean	sd	df	t	Sig.	Remark
Burnout	Male	109	44.17	9.42	160	1.08	.281	Not significant
	Female	53	42.47	9.21				

The results showed male (n =109, M = 44.17, SD = 9.42) and female (n = 53, M = 42.47, SD = 9.21) the t-statistics was 1.08, with df = 160 ($p > .05$). The result of this analysis indicates that there is no significant Mean difference in the level of burnout of Male and Female lecturers. In other words, gender, the condition of being male of female did not significantly predict lecturers' burnout experience. i.e. it may be concluded that male and female staff experienced burnout same way. Based on the result, the null hypothesis that stated that gender will not significantly predict burnout among lecturers is accepted.

The second hypothesis which stated that age will not significantly predict burnout among Staff was analysed using a One-way Analysis of Variance (ANOVA) and the result presented in Table 2.

Table 2: Result of one-way ANOVA comparing lecturers' burnout based on age

	Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.	Remark
Between Groups	437.802	3	145.934	1.689	.171	Not significant
Within Groups	13648.698	158	86.384			
Total	14086.500	161				

The results in table 2 above indicated that age did not significantly predict burnout among staff. In other words, age did not discriminate in terms of staff's experience of burnout, thus, age may not be considered as one of the factors that predict burnout among university lecturers. Based on the result, the null hypothesis that stated that age will not significantly predict burnout among lecturers is accepted.

The first research question which asked about the level of burnout among staff was answered using descriptive statistics which showed that 88 (54.3%) of the respondents reported significantly high level of burnout, 20 (12.4%) reported moderate level of burnout, while 54 (33.3%) reported low level of burnout.

The second research question which asked whether staff status (senior or junior) would determine staff level of burnout, results of descriptive analysis showed that more senior academic staff reported burnout compared to the junior ones.

Over 90% of staff expressed their joy at discharging their duties and don't feel stressed as a result of teaching in classrooms, however, there were other variables that were pointed out as constituting stress which is leading to burnout in their lives.

6. DISCUSSION

The result of data analysis suggested that there is no gender difference in the experience of burnout among staff. This is in contrast to some of the previous research reports which affirmed that female lecturers experienced more burnout than their counterparts {Fernandez-Suarez, et al., (2021); Watts and Robertson, (2011) and Vipene and Okirigwe (2021)}. This present study did not find any significant difference in the level of burnout of female and male university lecturers. Possible explanation for this could be that, since both female and male lecturers work within the same university environment, are exposed to the same job routine and demands, under the same work conditions they have similar experiences which they most probably have been responding to in similar ways. In other words, other variables aside gender would account for burnout among university lecturers. It could also have to do with the level of resilience and doggedness of the university lecturers irrespective of gender. Male and female lecturers alike most probably have developed strong resilience and doggedness that may have accounted for the observed result of no gender difference in burnout among university lecturers. Again, age did not significantly predict burnout among university lecturers. Lecturers of all ages have the tendency to experience burnout if the necessary precautions are not taken. The result of this present study is in contrast to some of the previous studies that asserted that though age was a significant predictor of burnout among university lecturers, younger lecturers experienced more burnout when compared with older lecturers. With the increasing demands on lecturers to be IT compliant in order to meet the post covid-19 education requirements, it is not unlikely that this demand has added to the stress and pressure that lecturers (both young and old) are facing which might have increased their predisposition to experiencing burnout irrespective of their ages (Li and Wang, 2020).

In addition, having been on the job for some years and owing to old age, there is high probability that their vitality and strength might be on the downward-turn as against the younger lecturers who are expected to be more vibrant and energetic. Another possible explanation for this result could be as a result of lethargy on the part of the old lecturers. It is no longer news that the condition of service for most lecturers in public institutions in Nigeria is unbearable; salaries are delayed, institutions lack basic infrastructures to facilitate smooth teaching and learning all of which can significantly affect the lecturers' morale. The younger lecturers, though may also feel the pain, but the difference may be in the fact that they are still vibrant and being not as old in the system may be motivated by the fact that they have been fortunate to secure a paid employment, unlike many of their counterparts that may still be in the labour market seeking for jobs, seemingly affirming the saying: 'a bird in hand is worth more than many in the

bush'. A seemingly endless wait for an elusive change could also account for the increased level of burnout observable among older lecturers. Year-in-year out, there had been several interactions, meetings and negotiations between the government and trade unions over the deplorable condition of higher education sector in Nigeria, this had resulted in industrial actions at different times, with little or nothing achieved. This kind of experience is sufficient to precipitate hopelessness, frustration, loss of interest in one's job and low job satisfaction and eventually burnout among the older lecturers.

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Of all the study participants only 54 (33.3%) reported low level of burnout while 88 (54.3%) reported significantly high level of burnout and 20 (12.4%) reported moderate level of burnout, making a total of 108 (66.7%) reporting burnout. This finding is in tandem with previous research reports that more university lecturers experience burnout {Lackritz, (2004) and Amir, (2020)}. More university lecturers therefore experience burnout in post covid-19 era and this calls for urgent intervention.

7. CONCLUSION

This study set out to investigate the level of burnout among university lecturers in a state university in southwestern part of Nigeria and to examine the influence of gender on same. Research findings established that over 66.7% of study participants experienced burnout, with most of them aged 56 years and above i.e. more older lecturers experienced burnout than the younger ones. Gender, however was not a significant predictor of burnout among lecturers of the university where sample was drawn. It is therefore essential, first that individual lecturers should endeavour to pay attention to themselves and device appropriate coping mechanisms to be able to manage stress before deteriorating into burnout. Lecturers should deliberately and consciously work towards reducing stressors through individual relaxation programmes, time management, training in interpersonal and social skills, team building, delegation of duties and meditation.

In addition to the above, university management should prioritise staff welfare and provision of better condition of service for lecturers. Government and other stakeholders should collaborate to ensure better life for lecturers and ensure that they derive job satisfaction as they discharge their duties. It is advisable that, in order to cope with job stress, lecturers must develop their ability for emotion regulation which is associated with positive effect, principal support and job satisfaction. Doing this will enable them to cope with the demands of their work that is mostly intensely emotion-laden, which if not properly handled may increase tension, resistance, exhaustion and decrease job satisfaction.

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