Management of stress amongst state universities' lecturers for improved performance: A quantitative approach

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Abstract

Purpose: This study aimed to assess the influence of stress on the performance of state university lecturers in the Southeast, Nigeria.

Research Methodology: To achieve this, a correlational survey design method was employed. The study encompassed all six state universities in southeastern Nigeria, focusing exclusively on academic staff. This research involved all state university lecturers on full-time appointments, ranging from professorial cadres to graduate assistants. Data were obtained from personnel offices of the six state universities under review. The social sciences statistical package was used to analyze the data and draw conclusions.

Results: The study revealed a significant positive impact of work-life balance on career development, as well as a marked positive impact of mental health management on the academic productivity of state university lecturers in southeast Nigeria.

Limitations: The study focused solely on the impact of stress among lecturers of state universities in southeast Nigeria and was limited to the six state universities approved by the National Universities Commission as of the 2023/2024 academic session.

Contribution: This study contributes to existing knowledge by introducing new indicators, such as work-life balance and mental health management, to the theme of stress management. It also adds to the empirical and theoretical evidence that could aid future scholars in exploring stress management further.

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Keywords: *Stressors, Performance, Mental Health, Work life Balance, Career Development*

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1. Introduction

The essence of managing stress is to reduce boredom and fatigue that are inherent in a task; it is obvious that excessive fatigue can lead to the unproductiveness of a person. According to Obiora, Iyke-Ofoedu, and Uzochukwu (2023),it is critical to develop the ability on how to identify situations in which stress levels are excessive. Our study argued that the easiest way for stress to sneak up on a person is what makes it so dangerous because it grows in you, and when it eventually does it begin to feel comfortable in you, almost as though like home. We observed that, although it has a significant negative impact on you, you are unaware of how much. In this study, we emphasize that stress overload can manifest as nearly any number of signs and symptoms. We further stated that there are numerous ways that stress impacts the mind, body, and behavior, and each person's experience with stress is unique (Widyani, Saraswati, & Wijaya, 2019). In addition to enhancing mental and physical well-being, the ability to control stress at work is thought to be a determining factor in the success or failure of an employee at

work (Orji & Yakubu, 2020). As stress affects how well people interact with each other, emotions can spread easily. An employee's positive impact on those around him increases with his/her ability to effectively manage his/her own stress (Abrigo et al., 2024). In the first paragraph, our study tried to provide a brief narrative of what stress is all about and how it controls the mind, body, and behavior of a person. In the next paragraph, we will focus more on the stress that occurs in the university environment among lecturers, how much it has endangered learning processes, and the future of education in Nigeria.

Lecturers are one of the major pillars of the university system; this is why university management ensures that their physical and mental state of health is prioritized from time to time. Managing the lecturer's level of stress, particularly chronic stress, is the goal of stress management, and measures aimed at ameliorating the effects of stressors at work are referred to as stress management (Nomuoja & Johnson, 2019). We believe that stress impairs lecturers' ability to concentrate or perform more effectively and efficiently, while Nomuoja and Johnson (2019) argued that too little stress may cause someone not to put forth enough effort to perform at their best levels. Our study supports the view of Nord, Fox, Phoenix, and Viano (2002) that stress and performance have a complicated relationship; for instance, stress that arises from work overload can cause boredom and mental health issues, which in turn reduces lecturers' creative output and participation in research publications, which should considerably boost their academic profile and productivity at work (Ameliah & Jatnika, 2024). However, University Management's main concern is that the growing expenses associated with overworked lecturers have been poor, which in turn reduces the university's global competitive prowess.

Our study identified the following factors that contribute to lecturer stress in the university as they carry out assigned tasks: issues with one's physical and mental health, pressure at work, work overload, having to meet deadlines, and untimely and unplanned schedules. However, we propose that taking control of thoughts, feelings, routines, surroundings, and approaches to problem-solving is the key to effectively managing lecturers' stress. According to Thorsen (1996), stress at work refers to negative physical and mental reactions that might occur as a result of having too much work. Uchechukwu and Ogah (2020) added that the psychological disturbances experienced by lecturers are mild and temporary, and they have recovered quickly. In contrast, Kumar and Chakraborty (2013) are of the view that the responsibilities of a lecturer are more mentally tasking; he studies so that he can prepare his lesson notes and teach; he studies and researches so that he can publish a good paper in a reputable journal; he sets examination questions for his students, marks and grades the script of his students, and many more he uses his brain to devise the best method, and all these tasks as enumerated can cause severe brain issues if the lecturer does not find time to relax his body and eat well. In line with the above argument, we noted that when a lecturer never recovers from stress, when stress persists for too long, or when stress interferes with day-to-day activities, it becomes a problem.

Alarmingly, we argued further that lecturers are under tremendous pressure to publish as many papers as possible in the shortest period of time in order to advance in their careers. This is specifically an obvious fact for junior lecturers, who are ranked as graduate assistants to Lecturer I. Strict promotion standards and guidelines, a demanding academic workload, and the time it takes for articles to be published in regional journals are some other frequently mentioned sources of stress in Nigerian universities. This assertion is based on the findings of Adeyi et al. (2023), who revealed that stress has a significant impact on employee performance. Their findings also showed a substantial correlation between employee performance and personal stress management strategies, which further suggests that personal stress management strategies should be encouraged because they are linked to workers' productivity.

Adeyi et al. (2023) noted that these stressors were having a detrimental effect on the performance of academic staff in Nigeria's universities. Studies on stress-related variables among academic staff members at universities worldwide, including Nigeria, have been conducted. Abdelhay, Haider, Abdulrahim, and Marie (2023)investigated the variables linked to stress at work among Botswana's university workers. According to their findings, there is a correlation between work stress and a number of workplace characteristics, including physical working conditions, responsibility clarity, and overload.

Faculty members at Punjab's public and private business schools in Pakistan are subject to significant stress due to a variety of factors, which Mo et al. (2020) looked into.

The effective management of stress has remained a matter of concern for university management and all academic staff of Nigerian universities (Adeyi et al., 2023). Stress is also said to be a major challenge for individuals and managers of corporate organizations. We argue that stress can emerge from distinct sources and involves separate individuals and work groups with different reactions. Some scholars hold that it is imperative to have as many stress management programs as possible to wage against the inevitable phenomenon (Abdelhay et al., 2023; Mo et al., 2020), while others believe that it is solely in the hands of management to eliminate stress in the work system by way of job flexibility and redesign (Saka & Wirastania, 2021). We further devised some specific objectives, measuring stress management with work-life balance and mental health management, while performance was measured with career development and academic productivity to guide the study. It was against this backdrop that our study was undertaken to investigate the impact of stress management on the performance of lecturers of state Universities in South east Nigeria, other specific objectives which were formulate to guide the study was;

1. Examine the impact of Work-Life Balance on Career Development of Lecturers of State Universities in South East, Nigeria.
2. Evaluate the impact of mental health management on the academic productivity of lecturers of state universities in Southeast Nigeria.

1.1 Research Question
1. To what extent does work–life balance impact the Career Development of Lecturers of State Universities in South East, Nigeria?
2. To what extent does Mental Health Management impact the Academic Productivity of Lecturers of State Universities in South East, Nigeria?

1.2 Hypotheses
$H_{01:}$ Work-Life Balance does not have an impact on the Career Development of Lecturers of State Universities in South East, Nigeria.

H_{04}: There is no significant positive relationship between Mental Health Management and Academic Productivity of Lecturers of State Universities in South East, Nigeria.

2. Literature review
2.1 Stress Management
According to Gobena (2024), stress management encompasses a broad range of methods and psychotherapies intended to regulate an individual's level of stress, particularly chronic stress, with the ultimate goal of enhancing daily functioning. Numerous physical and psychological symptoms of stress are produced, and they differ depending on the circumstances surrounding each person (Merlin, Vanchapo, & Riantiarno, 2022). These may include depression and deterioration of physical health, such as headaches, chest pain, exhaustion, and sleep issues (Mayo, 2022). According to Ates and Ihtiyaroglu (2019), one of the keys to a successful and happy life in today's world is learning how to manage stress. Bhojani and Kurucz (2020) state that while life frequently presents a multitude of demands that can be challenging to manage, stress management offers several strategies for reducing anxiety and preserving general wellbeing. Although stress is frequently perceived as a subjective experience, it can be easily measured using a variety of physiological tests, including polygraph-like tests (Dallman et al., 1993).

There are various stress management models, and each one provides a unique account of how stress is controlled (Kang, Shin, Baek, & Chung, 2019). To provide a better understanding of which mechanisms work in reality and are practical, scholars need to explore the theme of stress in the workplace. Although stress can sometimes be harmful, it can also have beneficial effects on today's society. According to Kim and Beehr (2023), humans and animals may behave more actively under mild stress, but their performance may be negatively affected by extreme stress. In 2023, Khattak, Rehman, and Hashmi (2024) defined stress as an individual's reaction to situations that frighten, threaten,

enrage, perplex or excite them. The impact of stress can be both beneficial and detrimental for workers in any organization, depending on the level of tolerance. E. (2019) and Dwamena (2012) noted that stress can positively affect workers.

2.1.2 Mental Health Management

Mental health management is an application used by mental health providers and related staff to manage the behavior and health of their patients to provide support through easy access to behavioral health care (Dwamena, 2012) or even for general mental health management. Welin (2020) is of the opinion that the official definition refers to a style of care that involves educating patients and their support systems about managing their healthcare journey more effectively. Rather than simply treating a disease, as would traditionally happen under a "case management" model, mental healthcare management emphasizes prevention, education, and social support systems. In this way, the management of care can be led by healthcare teams, but implemented by individuals outside of standard healthcare systems. This more comprehensive route reduces the burden on healthcare teams, while increasing public health.

Strategies for managing mental health include prescription drugs for mental health disorders, seeking mental health therapy or making lifestyle changes (McPhillips, 2022). If one has a mental or behavioral health condition, using all three strategies is the most effective way to manage symptoms. According to the CDC (2024), managing mental health requires commitment to engage in self-care, which includes regular exercise, proper nutrition, and paying attention to our spiritual lives. Spending time in nature is a powerful antidote for stress. Keeping connected to others is the single most robust factor in helping the inevitable storms of weather life (Abonyo, 2020). Fazel (2023) opine that many causes of mental health problems also have physical consequences, and mental illness worsens the prognosis of a range of physical illnesses, especially heart disease, diabetes and cancer."

According to the Public Health Agency of Canada, mental health is the ability of a person to feel, think, and act in ways that respect social, cultural, and personal boundaries, leading to better quality of life. Any of these impairments is a risk factor for mental illnesses, which are a subset of mental disorders and mental health (Dallman et al., 1993). Mental disorders are medical conditions that impact and modify behaviors linked to distress and/or impaired functioning, emotional responses, and cognitive functioning (Hess & Copeland, 2001).Numerous lifestyle factors, including nutrition, exercise, stress, drug abuse, and social interactions and connections, are linked to mental health (Park, Park, Jang, Oh, & Oh, 2020). According to Manger (2019), family doctors, therapists, psychiatrists, psychologists, social workers, nurse practitioners, and psychiatrists can assist in managing mental illnesses through medication, therapy, and counseling.

The psychological, social, and emotional well-being of individuals is measured by their mental health (Llamas, 2024). The thoughts, emotions, and behaviors of individuals are impacted. In addition to affecting physical health, poor mental health can contribute to mental diseases such as depression and anxiety. Maintaining or enhancing mental health is possible for people of all ages (McPhillips 2022). According to the National Library of Medicine, medical professionals consider psychological, emotional, and social wellbeing. Without a formal diagnosis or course of treatment, many people may encounter transient difficulties with mental health that may go away rather quickly. Others might suffer from chronic or long-term mental health conditions, which can be treated to promote general physical, social, and mental health. Drugs and psychotherapy are common components of treatment regimens for individuals with mental health diagnoses (Pervanidou and Chrousos, 2012). To enhance their general well-being and mental health, they might also benefit from assistance in developing strategies.

2.1.3 Work Life Balance

Balancing work and other responsibilities in life is the process of achieving work-life balance. According to Soares and Woods (2020), flexible work arrangements typically enable employees to balance their personal and professional lives. Work–life balance is a broad concept that encompasses a healthy balance between one's aspirations and career on the one hand, leisure, travel, and family life. According to Lewis (2019), the two main concerns of workers are prolonged working hours and the

strength and intensity of their work. Initially, work-life balance was represented in terms of outcomes, according to Thornburg and Jones (1982). Conflicts within the family are characterized by the coexistence of two or more pressures, which makes it more difficult to comply with one in particular. Yang, Viladrich, and Cruz (2022) noted that most workers struggle to strike a balance between their personal and professional lives. Individual performance in both the personal and professional spheres is impacted by a lack of work-life equilibrium. According to Khattak et al. (2024), workers who have a better work-life balance can have a bigger impact on the expansion and success of the company.

2.1.4 Career development

Career development refers to the process by which an individual evolves their occupational status. It is the process of making decisions for long-term learning to align personal needs of physical or psychological fulfillment with career advancement opportunities (Setyawati et al., 2022). Career Development can also be referred to as the total encompassment of an individual's work-related experiences, leading to the occupational role they may hold within an organization. Career development can occur at the individual or organizational level. According to De Oliveira et al. (2019), an individual's personal initiatives that they pursue for their career development are primarily concerned with their personal values, goals, interests, and the path required to fulfill these desires. A degree of control and sense of urgency over a personal career development path can require individuals to pursue additional education or training initiatives to align with their goals.

Career development is the process of learning and utilizing short-term skills to achieve long-term professional goals. This process is often life-long and involves steadily reaching milestones specific to their designated career paths (Paais & Pattiruhu, 2020). Much of career development calls for reflection and exploration of purpose in your work and is the foundation for achieving larger career growth. According to Sulila (2019), career development is the progression of the short-term steps taken to achieve long-term professional goals. It involves building role-specific skill sets and can include taking night classes, networking, seeking out a mentor, and taking on new responsibilities in your current job (U. E. Udo, Emmanuel, & Umana, 2024). Effective career development requires a thoughtful approach: deciding on a career goal and then mapping out the experience, competencies, and connections you need to get there.

In relation to this, career anchors categorize people as investigative, realistic, artistic, social, enterprising, and conventional, in which the career path will depend on the characteristic that an individual may embody. The more aware an individual is of their personality type, the better the alignment of career development and opportunities they may obtain. De Oliveira et al. (2019) emphasized that the factors that influence an individual to make proper career goal decisions also rely on environmental factors that directly affect them. We also observed that decisions are based on varying aspects affecting work-life balance, desires to align career options with their personal values, and the degree of stimulation or growth.

Career development encourages better use of employee skills. It aids the organization by allowing managers to be aware of their skills and competencies so that they can apply them in a position or occupation where they will be able to obtain better results. De Oliveira et al. (2019) argue that career development offers employees and managers beneficial assistance with regard to career decisions. Moreover, they acquire the opportunity to evaluate their skills and competencies and discover their objectives and future plans. Because organizations need to retain their indispensable assets and prepare them for top-level positions in the future, they must understand their career expectations and requirements from their organization, which is accomplished with the aid of career development plans.

2.1.5 Academic Productivity

Academic productivity describes the progressive and growing improvements that surround one's academic journey (Johanson, 2021). The indicators of academic productivity are the annual number of academic publications submitted for peer review relative to the number of researchers working in the institution in question (Ichdan, 2024), and other types of publications that are the products of research. The term academic productivity, which gained importance in the 1970s, refers to producing and

promoting knowledge. Since it is predominantly based on various aspects of research, teaching, social activities, and scientific research, it is generally considered a multidimensional process (Unyime et al., 2022). Academic productivity is accepted as a strenuous topic because of the multidimensional structure of scientific knowledge production, and there have been some people who approach the topic from different perspectives (Unyime et al., 2022).

In academic circles, publishing promotes and recognizes both academics and their institutions. (E. U. Udo, 2023). The process of academic productivity is not only about instructors, but also an issue with which universities are closely concerned. With the improvement in economic strategies based on information, the classification of universities has gained importance, and this classification is linked to academic productivity. In recent times, in determining the rank of the countries in scientific world, in comparison of universities or institutions in terms of their scientific qualifications and in evaluation of the academic performances of the scientists, three criteria which bring "international publishing activities" into the forefront have generally been accepted;
1. The number of the papers published in international journals,
2. Publishing the papers in scientific journals which are reviewed by scientific indexing services
3. Number of citations in papers.

Samuel and Udo (2023)stated that when the common features of the top universities which take first places in university rankings are studied, the activity of academic productivity come to the front.

2.2 Theoretical Review
2.2.1 General Adaptation Theory (GAS)
This study was anchored on the Stress Syndrome Model known as the 'General adaptation syndrome, ' which was propounded by Hans Selye, who lived between 1907-1982, he proposed a model to determine the extent to which the body can react to stressors. Stressors are events, situations, and/or circumstances that we are exposed to, which makes us feel stressed. Hence, some scholars in the field of psychology have explained that stress refers to how the body reacts to stressors at any point in time; it may further be expressed in biological terms known as stimuli, and psychological terms known as reality or imagination. We observed from the reviewed literature that the general adaptation syndrome developed by Hans Selye can be said to be a depiction of how a person responds to stress in his workplace. This theory was further explained in three specific terms: the alarm stage, which encourages sympathetic nervous system activities; the resistance stage, which propels a person to make efforts in coping amidst a threat; and the exhaustion stage, in which the threat overwhelms the person or when the person fails to overcome the threat, but rather depletes its psychological resources.

In view of the main argument in this research, which was improving the performance of lecturers through the management of stress in the work environment, we argued further that lecturers pass through these three stages of stress as proposed by Hans Selye in the GAS model because at the alarm stage, we have come to understand that lecturers have a huge workload to overcome at their workplace, which can range from preparing lesson notes for lectures, studying and researching to obtain current information, teaching students, setting examination questions, marking answer scripts, grading answer scripts, uploading examination results on the university portal, approval of courses online, counseling of students, writing of investigative and scholarly manuscripts for publication in reputable journals, and other administrative functions as assigned by the Head of Department, Dean of faculty, or State University Management. In our opinion, this long range of saddled academic activities can create a stressor that can bring forth the alarm stage of the gas model.

Similarly, the consequence of the resistance stage of the gas model proposes that several long ranges of academic activities are bound to exist in the assigned duties of lecturers, supporting the view of Van Kampen (2019), who stated that lecturers can be consistent in making efforts to assuage stressors as they come from time to time in their line of duties. This resistant stage of the gas model is a benchmark for lecturers because, at this stage, they still have the leverage to devise measures of withstanding and addressing stress, but where they fail, the next stage can become very disastrous. In the third stage of the gas model, we implored the view of Barrett (2020), which states that the body can send a message

of exhaustion to the brain to short down if it can no longer withstand or accommodate pressures from stress at the workplace. We argue further that lecturers of State Universities should be able to determine the level of pressure their body system can control, because if they are not able to determine such, the body system will automatically break down, thereby causing metal damage and a reduction in the work force (Ichdan & Maryani, 2024).

2.2.2 Relevance of the Gas Model to this Study.
The theory is relevant to the study of stress management in improving lecturers' performance in several ways, one of which is that it enables lecturers to know when their body is exposed to either positive or negative stress in their line of duties. To avert the total breakdown of the body system in line with Selye's Gas Model, we affirm the opinion of Notaras and van den Buuse (2020), which encourages lecturers to know and understand their body mechanism, and how much it can be subdued in pressure, so as to know when to abort continuous workload that can aid more stress. We argue that, based on the three stages of stress as described by Hans Selye, it is necessary that lecturers follow modalities that can ameliorate stressful situations with adequate resilience. Resilience is the capacity or ability to withstand or recover quickly from difficulties, toughness, or challenging situations in a changing work environment. However, we observed that there is a limitation in the gas model of Hans Selye, because his study was conducted on animals and other organisms and used to make inferences on humans, and we therefore argued that the response of humans to stressors might defer in several distinct ways if the study was originally conducted on humans.

2.3 Empirical Review
Chikezie, Adedeji, Meduna, and Joshua (2023) examined the causes and management of stress amongst hotel employees in Ilorin West Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. This study used a descriptive design. The study population comprised employees of six hotels in the Ilorin West Local Government Area, Kwara State, Nigeria. The findings revealed that the most perceived causes of stress among respondents were staff shortages in the department (4.93), underpaying (4.72), and undefined job descriptions and expectations (4.64). Low output (3.85) and absence from work (3.73) were the most significant perceived effects of stress on job performance. The study recommends that regular performance reviews, options for career development, and a sense of autonomy should be utilized by employers to reduce employees' stress.

Ogomegbunam (2023) examined stress management strategies and employee performance in manufacturing firms in Edo State, Brazil. The data were analyzed using both descriptive and Pearson's and Spearman's rank correlation statistics. Empirical results show that employees in manufacturing firms receive maximum workplace social support, which helps them deal with stressful work situations, and have high coping competence in handling stress. In addition, it was revealed that time management was the most adopted stress management strategy among workers in manufacturing firms, and they practiced it to a high extent.

Anyamere (2023) from Nigeria investigated and evaluated job stress and its effect on employee performance at the Unilever Nigeria Plc. This study sought to determine how work-related stress could affect the productivity of the staff of Unilever Nigeria Plc. A systematic sampling technique was used to select 80 participants for the study. The results of this study revealed that workload was the major cause of job stress on employee performance in Unilever Nigeria. It was further observed that respondents, in order to relieve stress, often walk around and visit other colleagues in their office to discuss matters irrelevant to work, thereby affecting productivity at the Unilever Nigeria Plc.

Grace, Leonard, and Nnaemeka (2023) from Nigeria examined the effect of stress management techniques on employee job performance of manufacturing firms in Nigeria. Specifically, they sought to ascertain the effect of the meditation technique on the employee effectiveness of manufacturing firms, and evaluate the effect of the relaxation technique on the job satisfaction of manufacturing firms. The study design was a descriptive survey. The hypotheses were tested using regression analysis, which comprises t-statistic, f-statistic, and correlation analysis. The empirical results show that the meditation technique has a significant effect on employee effectiveness in manufacturing firms. The study

concluded that stress management techniques had a positive and significant effect on the performance of employees of manufacturing firms in Nigeria.

Dwamena (2012) conducted a study to examine the effect of stress on employees' productivity in Ghana Ports and Habours Authority, Takoradi. Data were analyzed using mean, standard deviation, and simple percentage methods. The empirical results show that there were many stress factors that the respondents endured, and the inquiry proved that stress had an effect on productivity. It was recommended that management conduct an analysis of the organizational mood and climate by assessing the reasons why employees think GPHA, Takoradi does not care about its employees and what they can do to change it.

Patro and Kumar (2019) investigated the effect of workplace stress management techniques on employee efficiency in the banking industry in Nigeria. The specific objectives of this study were to examine the effects of chronic, traumatic, and acute stress on employee performance in the banking sector in Nigeria. Regression statistics were used for data analysis. A sample of 79 employees was drawn from 105 populations in the selected banks. The results indicate that stress program interventions and T&D have a significant influence on employees' efficiency.

Popovic et al. (2022) studied the importance of stress reduction in managing cardiovascular disease - the role of exercise. The purpose of this article is to review the impact of acute and chronic stress on CVD risk and elaborate repositioning guidelines, with emphasis on approaches for stress reduction. The findings indicated that regular exercise, both aerobic and resistance, leads to better adaptiveness to other types of stress. However, it remains unknown whether the total amount of stress one can experience before negative health effects are unlimited.

Ling and Mok (2024) investigated on managing stressors, stress and strain faced by facility managers in Singapore. Using the job demands-resources (JD-R) model, stressors are operationalized from job demands, job resources, and personal resource constructs. A structured questionnaire was used to collect data from FMs in Singapore. FMs have significantly high levels of stress but can manage this well. Job demands that cause stress and strain are related to insufficient time to complete the work and difficulties in handling it.

Nordzro (2017) conducted a study to examine the effects of stress on employees' performance in UT Bank in the Western Region of Ghana. The research indicated that although all the respondents were at different levels of responsibility and worked in the same place under similar conditions, they all responded to the pressure of the work in different ways. In other words, stressors at UT Bank, Ghana Limited, do not have the same effect on all employees who participated in the study. It is recommended that there is a need for employers to show that they take stress seriously, and therefore understand employees who admit to being under stress.

Uchechukwu and Ogah (2020) examined the impact of stress management on the employee performance of selected deposit money banks in Osogbo, Osun State, and Nigeria. Linear regression and correlation analyses were used to analyze the data. The findings showed that there is a relationship between work-life balance and employees' performance, work overload, and employees' performance and organizational change on employees' performance. The study recommended that management of selected deposit money banks should design tasks and jobs in ways that would make for effectiveness and efficiency and bring about improvement in the productivity of their workforce.

Sucharitha and Basha (2020) examined the impact of job stress on job security of employee performance of medical doctors in Rawalpindi. A field study was conducted using a questionnaire as the primary data-collection instrument. Data were analyzed using statistical techniques with SPSS Version 16. The analysis showed immense support for a negative relationship between stress and job performance, greatly affecting career change and job satisfaction. The results showed that with every unit increase in personal dilemmas, decrease in financial reward, decrease in influence over work environment, and decrease in supervisor support, there would be 0.513, 0.079, 0.266, and 0.117, respectively. All of these results are statistically significant, thus providing rigor and generalized research.

2.4 Gap in Literature

Prior studies that were conducted under the subject matter were stress management, focusing on sectors such as hospitality, as found in the study of Chikezie et al. (2023); Sucharitha and Basha (2020), Ogomegbunam (2023); Grace et al. (2023) investigated the level of employees stress in the manufacturing sector, Anyamere (2023) evaluated job stress amongst employees in the consumable goods sector, Dwamena (2012) examined stress at the Ghana port authority which was categorized under the servicing sector, Patro and Kumar (2019); Nordzro (2017); Uchechukwu and Ogah (2020) carried out their studies on stress within employees in the banking sector. However, to the best of our knowledge, only a few studies have been conducted on the education sector. Ilonze (2024) examined the impact of Stress Management on the Performance of Public University Lecturers in South East, Nigeria, our study, which intended to close the sectoral gap in the literature focused specifically on Stress Management in State Universities in Southeast Nigeria. Similarly, to address the geographical gap in the literature, our study will join a few studies that have been carried out in Southeast Nigeria under the theme of stress management.

3. Methodology

This study adopted a correlational survey research design of the academic staff of six state universities (Abia State University, Uturu (ABSU); Chukwuemeka Odumegwu Ojukwu University, Igbariam (COOU); Ebonyi State University, Abakaliki (EBSU): Enugu State University of Technology, Agbani (ESUT); Imo State University, Owerri (IMSU); State University of Medical & Applied Sciences, Igbo-Eno, SUMAS) in Southeast Nigeria. For want of time, our study specifically surveyed six (6) faculties which included; Faculty of Arts (150), Agriculture (95), Education (398), Management Sciences (350), Law (156) and Social sciences (398). The element of the population was one thousand five hundred and forty-seven (1547) academic staff, and was reduced to 297 with the aid of (Borg, Gall, and Gall (1979). With the aid of a stratified random sampling technique, the instrument (Likert-style questionnaire) was administered to two hundred and ninety seven academic staff of the concerned state universities in southeast Nigeria. Cronbach's alpha test was used to test the reliability of the research instrument, which gave a value of 0.889, indicating that the items contained in the research instrument were viable and effective in yielding positive results. The study adopted linear regression analysis contained in the statistical package for social sciences to carry out its analysis while determining the impact of the variables adopted in the study.

4. Results and discussions

4.1 Test of Hypotheses

4.1.1 Test of Hypothesis One

$H_{01:}$ Work-Life Balance does not have an impact on the career development of state universities' lecturers in the Southeast, Nigeria.

Model One; Y_1 WLB = $\beta_o + \beta_1 \, CARDEV + \mu$ -   -   -   -   - $\mathbf{Ho_1}$

Table 1. Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Work-Life Balance[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Career Development
b. All requested variables entered.

The table above indicates the variables that were added and removed from the software package during the analysis. This means that work-life balance was entered as the independent variable, and career development was entered as the dependent variable. However, no variables from hypothesis one were removed.

Table 2. Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.888[a]	.876	.007	.92180

a. Predictors: (Constant), Work-Life Balance
b. Dependent Variable: Career Development

Table 2 provided the R and R^2 values. The R value represents a simple correlation at a value of 0.88, which indicates a high degree of correlation with the impact of work-life balance on career development. The R^2 value of 0.008 indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable (career development) was explained by the independent variable (work-life balance). This means that 87.6% was said to have had a high impact on the explained variables

Table 3. ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	6.047	1	6.047	7.116	.000[b]
	Residual	780.036	918	.850		
	Total	786.083	919			

a. Dependent Variable: Career Development
b. Predictors: (Constant), Work-Life Balance

Table 3 shows that the regression model predicts that the dependent variable (career development) is significantly positive. This also indicates that the statistical significance of the regression model adequately fits the data. Here, $p < 0.000$, which was less than 0.05, indicates the overall, and further shows that the regression model was statistically significant in predicting the outcome variable, that is, it is a good fit for the data.

Table 4. Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	4.071	.147		27.737	.001
	Work-Life Balance	.086	.032	.088	25.668	.001

a. Dependent Variable: Career Development

The coefficient table provides us with the necessary information to predict the impact of work-life balance on career development, as well as determine whether career development contributes significantly to model development. At a t-value of 27.737 and a coefficient of 0.001, we conclude that work-life balance was positively significant to career development.

Rationale for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis
Based on this significant value, the null hypothesis is rejected or rejected. Consequently, if the Sig value was < (less than) 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Consequently, the Sig value was > (greater than) 0.05, and the null hypothesis was not rejected. If a null hypothesis is rejected, it means there is an impact

Decision;
Since the p-value was 0.001 and less than the estimated sig value of 0.05 as the rule provided, we rejected the null hypothesis and concluded that work-life balance has a significant positive impact on career development.

4.2.2 Test of Hypothesis Two
H_{02}: There is no significant positive relationship between mental health management and academic productivity of state university lecturers in the South East, Nigeria.

Model Two; Y_4 *MHMGT* = $\beta o + \beta_1 ACAPRO + \mu$ - - - - - -
H_{02}

Table 5.   Variables Entered/Removed[a]

Model	Variables Entered	Variables Removed	Method
1	Mental Health Management[b]	.	Enter

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Productivity
b. All requested variables entered.

Table 5 indicates the variables that were added and removed from the software package during the analysis. This means that mental health management was entered as the independent variable and academic productivity was entered as the dependent variable. However, no variables from hypothesis one were removed.

Table 6.   Model Summary[b]

Model	R	R Square	Adjusted R Square	Std. Error of the Estimate
1	.634[a]	.802	.401	.69152

a. Predictors: (Constant), Mental Health Management
b. Dependent Variable: Academic Productivity

Table 6 provided the R and R^2 values. The R value represents the simple correlation at a value of 0.634 which indicates a high degree of correlation on the impact of mental health management on academic productivity. The R^2 value of 0.802 indicates how much of the total variation in the dependent variable (academic productivity) was explained by the independent variable (mental health management). This means that 80.2% of the variables had a significant impact on the explained variables.

Table 7.   ANOVA[a]

Model		Sum of Squares	df	Mean Square	F	Sig.
1	Regression	295.272	1	295.272	617.462	.000[b]
	Residual	438.989	918	.478		
	Total	734.261	919			

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Productivity
b. Predictors: (Constant), Mental Health Management

Table 7 shows that the regression model predicts that the dependent variable (academic productivity) is significant. This also indicates that the statistical significance of the regression model adequately fits the data. Here, $p < 0.000$, which was less than 0.05, indicates the overall, and further shows that the regression model was statistically significant in predicting the outcome variable, that is, it is a good fit for the data.

Table 8. Coefficients[a]

Model		Unstandardized Coefficients		Standardized Coefficients		
		B	Std. Error	Beta	t	Sig.
1	(Constant)	1.650	.115		26.317	.012
	Mental Health Management	.631	.025	.634	24.849	.012

a. Dependent Variable: Academic Productivity

The coefficient table provides us with the necessary information to predict the impact of mental health management on academic productivity and determine whether academic productivity contributes significantly to model productivity. At a t-value of 26.317 and a coefficient of 0.000, we conclude that workload management was positively significant for job satisfaction.

Rationale for accepting or rejecting the null hypothesis
Based on this significant value, the null hypothesis is rejected or rejected. Consequently, if the Sig value was < (less than) 0.05, the null hypothesis was rejected. Consequently, the Sig value was > (greater than) 0.05, and the null hypothesis was not rejected. If a null hypothesis is rejected, it implies that there is an impact.

Decision;
Since the p-value was 0.012, which is less than the estimated sig value of 0.05 as the rule provided, we reject the null hypothesis and conclude that mental health management has a significant positive impact on academic productivity.

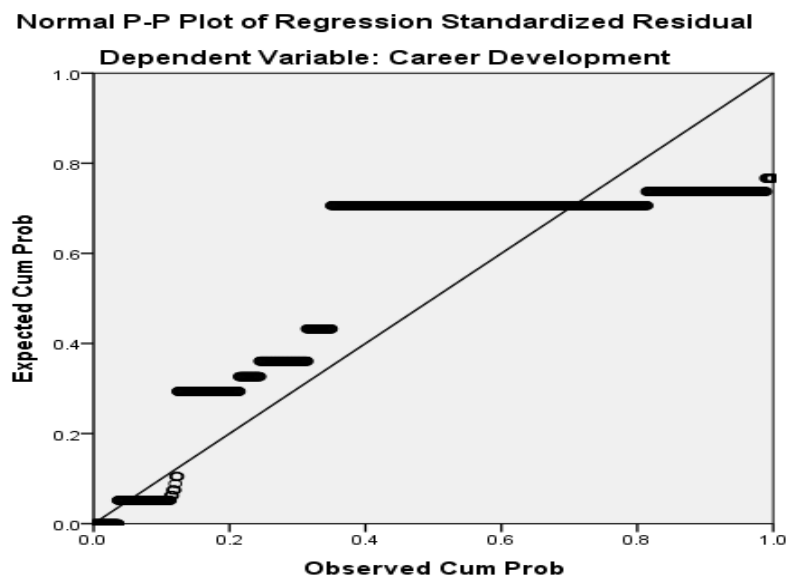*4.3 Discussion of Findings*
4.3.1 Hypothesis One

Figure 1

The diagrammatical illustration in Figure 7 shows the impact of work-life balance on career development, as expressed in hypothesis one. The horizontal dark lines were observed to be moving towards a parallel axis or towards the east at the same time from point 0.0 0.8. At the point of intersection between the dark line and light line, the curve recorded a value of 0.7 (0.8-0.1 or 0.6+0. 1). The implication of this result indicates that the independent variable (work-life balance) has a significant positive impact on the career development of state university lecturers at a value of 70%. This finding conforms to the finding of Joshua, Chehab, David, and Salim (2021) which also revealed that work related stress reduces employees' performance during the covid-19 period, and also the study of Merlin et al. (2022) that argued that work-life balance has a significant impact on career development.

4.3.2 Hypothesis Two

Normal P-P Plot of Regression Standardized Residual
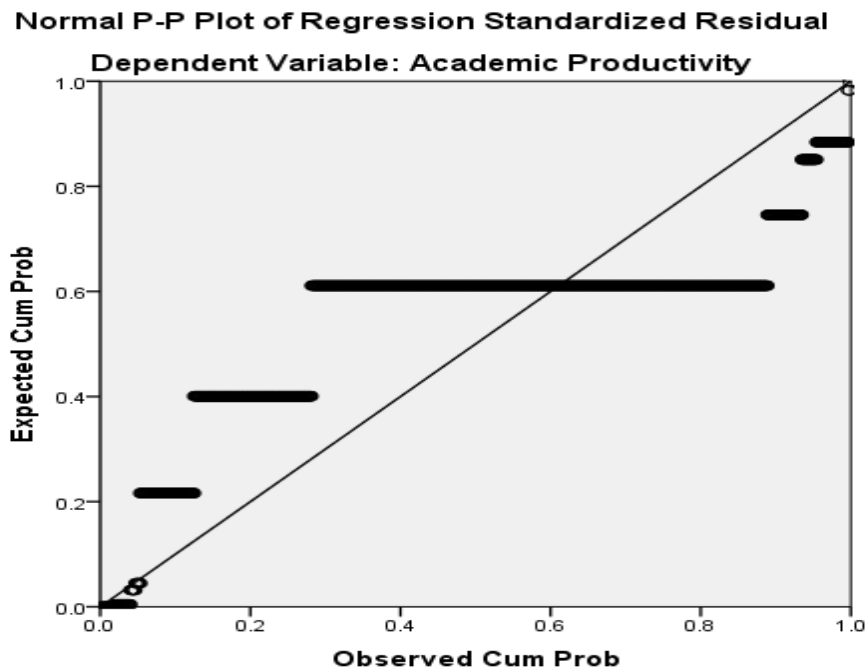**Dependent Variable: Academic Productivity**

Figure 2.

The diagrammatical illustration in Figure 10 shows the impact of mental health management on academic productivity, as expressed in hypothesis four. The horizontal dark lines were observed to be moving towards a parallel axis or towards the east at the same time from point 0.0 0.9. At the point of intersection between the dark line and light line, the curve recorded a value of 0.64 (0.8-0.16 or 0.6+0.04). The implication of this result indicates that the independent variable (mental health management) has a significant positive impact on the academic productivity of state universities' lecturers at a value of 64%, which is greater than 0.50 or 50% but not more than 1.0 or 100%. The findings of this study agree with those of Gobena (2024), which stated that effective mental health management is liable to yield increased productivity.

5. Conclusion

This study examined the relationship between stress management and the performance of public university lecturers in Southeast Nigeria. The independent variable (stress management) was measured using work–life balance and mental health management. Thereafter, the dependent variable, performance, was measured using career development and academic productivity. The study generated it data specifically from the primary source, one of which was the use of likert questionnaire distributed and retrieved from the two hundred and ninety seven (297) respondents that formed the sample population. Using the Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) IBM version 25, linear regression was used to establish the impact of the independent and dependent variables. The study revealed a positive significant impact between work-life balance and career development at a p-value of 0.001, as well as mental health management and academic productivity at a p-value of 0.012 for state universities' lecturers in southeast Nigeria, at a 5% level of significance.

The implication of these findings is that state university lecturers will only perform more effectively and efficiently when they are able to balance their work and social life because, as humans are, certain responsibilities are required, specifically from family members, social groups, and peer groups, and these responsibilities ought to be fulfilled to balance an employee's mindset. Prior studies have narrated the ill-effect of stressors arising from an imbalanced work-life on the performance of employees at their workplace, the studies of Grace et al. (2023); Mayo investigatedo investigate the resultant effects oflife, and,work lifeing work-life to measure stress ;s a variable, their resul our findings, our firevealeds which raled that stressorked stressors reworkng from awork lifeced work-lifincan result to employee

breakdown, malfun,,ction at work and a total collapse of an organization. This was why their study suggested and we concurred that state university management encourages their academic staff to utilize their annual leave, semester breaks, or accrued leave to balance other social and family engagement in order to help them draw a gap between their job and family activities.

We went forward to address one of the most vital issues that has continually caused havoc and eaten deep into our educational system: the issue of mental health. It is appalling to say that mental health issues should only be a thing of concern to people whose mental state of health has been determined by experts to be worrisome, suffice it to also say that the level of stress among lecturers at their different universities in the southeast is quite alarming, the excessive and increased workload resulting from brain drain and migration of the elite labor force, as stated by Uchechukwu and Ogah (2020). Our study found a significant effect of unchecked mental health among academic staff of state universities in the southeast, suggesting that university management encourages lecturers to go for a regular health review, and where the health challenge of a particular lecturer becomes severe; such lecturer should be a matter of urgency to make a report through their heads of department to the university management, an application to embark on sick leave. This is necessary because determining the state of mental health at an early stage will assuage severe dangers that may accumulate over time.

5.1. Contributions to Knowledge

Many studies have examined the relationships between stress management and performance in the hospitality, banking, and industrial goods and consumable goods sectors. However, this study adds to the knowledge by determining the impact of stress management on the performance of the education sector, with a specific focus on public University Lecturers in South East, Nigeria. Similarly, prior studies have measured stress management with indicators such as job flexibility, role conflict, work-family relationship, and job redesigning, while this study contributed to knowledge by adding a new indicator such as work-life balance and mental health management to the theme of stress management. Furthermore, this study adds to the empirical and theoretical evidence that will assist future scholars who wish to continue investigating the theme of stress management.

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