

EFFECTS OF AGGRESSIVE BEHAVIOUR, PERCEIVED SELF EFFICACY AND STATE ANXIETY ON BURNOUT AMONG STUDENT UNION LEADERS IN NIGERIAN TERTIARY INSTITUTIONS

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Abstract

The study investigated aggressive Behaviour, Perceived Self Efficacy and State Anxiety as they influence burnout among students' union leaders in tertiary institutions in Nigeria. It was conducted using the survey research design. One hundred and fifty (150) participants (students' union leaders) were randomly selected from three tertiary institutions in Abuja. The sample population consisted of both males and females from diverse educational and socio-cultural background and experience. Their age range was 18-25 years of age. Two research questions were answered using multiple regression analysis. The findings showed that there were combined significant effects of the independent variables on burnout of the students' union leaders who participated in the study. Also there was significant effect of each of the independent variables on the students' union leaders' burnout. The implications were discussed therein.

Keywords: Aggressive Behaviour, Perceived Self Efficacy, State Anxiety, Burnout, youth restiveness

Introduction

The rate of violence in Nigerian tertiary institution campuses is alarming. Its import on the present and future wellbeing of the nation could be catastrophic. One of the sources of this violence and restiveness may be as a result of stress and burnout being experienced by students in our tertiary institutions. The rising cost of tuition fees, erratic power supply, cultism and unsafe social settings of the schools may all be reasons why students are experiencing frustration. In the long run, one of the after-effects of the burnout is poor academic performance. In this study, effect of aggressive behaviour, perceived self efficacy and state anxiety was examined on burnout among student union leaders in Nigeria Tertiary Institutions.

Burnout is increasingly prevalent in schools environment. With the rapid pace of change and the ever-increasing demands on students' time, burnout becomes a major factor that most students have to contend with. When individuals experience burnout, they undergo severe physical and emotional exhaustion that is associated with negative work attitudes, poor performance and a lack of concern for others (Handy, 1988).

Burnout is characterized by increased emotional exhaustion, depersonalization, and reduced personal accomplishment, primarily occurring in those individuals intensely dealing with other people. Burnout occurs when a person has reached a state of mental and physical exhaustion coupled with a sense of frustration and personal failure. Burnout is prevalent among human service professionals, where client interaction revolves around a provider-receiver relationship (Okun, 2002). But it could also be a readily-observable psychological condition among students, especially student union leaders, who combine pseudo political responsibilities with their primary assignment (academic activities). The purpose of this study, therefore, is to examine some psychological variables such as aggressive behaviour, perceived self efficacy and state anxiety, and how they determine burnout among student union leaders in Nigerian tertiary institutions.

Aggression is any form of behaviour directed towards the goal of harming or injuring another living being who is motivated to avoid such treatment (Arunima, 1994). Troubled people are very angry. They may not express it directly, but they will when provoked. Anger does not necessarily have any particular goal and refers only to a

particular set of feelings. Aggression though, is sometimes instigated by frustration. Contemporary psychoanalytic thinkers view aggression as a response or reaction to frustrating relationships rather than as an instinct (Berkowitz, 1993; Okun, 2002). Van den Ardweg and Van den Aardweg (1993) refer to aggression as a postulate of behaviour due to frustration and define aggression as destructive or punitive behaviour directed towards people or objects. It includes physical assaults, such as hitting, kicking, biting and shoving. Verbal assaults involve making threats and name-calling. It is a disruptive behaviour that interferes with another person's pleasure or achievements (Berkowitz, 1993). In brief, the above views of aggression clearly show aggression as behaviour (undesirable), with a motivation or goal in mind (Berkowitz, 1993)

Scholars such as Johnson (2003) and Berkowitz (1993) substantiated their findings that in competitive context, individuals strive to outperform each other. Competition can generate aggression and competitive situations can be viewed as frustrations as the opponents may deprive them of their desired goal.

Self-efficacy beliefs are defined as people's judgments of their capabilities to organize and execute courses of action required to attain designated types of performances (Bandura, 1977). People's beliefs about their efficacy can be developed through four main sources of influence: mastery experiences, vicarious experiences, social persuasion, and somatic and emotional states such as anxiety, stress, arousal, and mood states (Bandura, 1994). Self-efficacy beliefs can enhance human accomplishment and well-being in numerous ways. It influences the choices people make and the courses of action they pursue. Unless people believe that their actions will have the desired consequences, they have little incentive to engage in those actions. Self-efficacy beliefs also help determine how much effort people will expend on an activity, how long they will persevere when confronting obstacles, and how resilient they will be in the face of adverse situations (Pajares, 1997). The higher the sense of efficacy, the greater the effort, persistence, and resilience. Self-efficacy beliefs also impact on individual's thoughts and emotional reactions. High self-efficacy helps create feelings of peacefulness in approaching difficult tasks and activities. Conversely, people with low self-efficacy are prone to burnout because they always believe that things are tougher than they

really are; a belief that promotes anxiety, stress, depression, and a narrow vision of how best to solve a problem (Bandura, 1994; Pajares, 1997).

According to Bandura (1977), self-efficacy is mediated by a person's beliefs or expectations about his/her capacity to accomplish certain tasks successfully or demonstrate certain behaviors (Hackett and Betz, 1981). He postulated that these expectations determine whether or not a certain behavior or performance will be attempted, the amount of effort the individual will contribute to the behavior, and how long the behavior will be sustained when obstacles are encountered (Bandura, 1977). When individuals have low self-efficacy, they limit the extent to which they participate in an endeavor and are more apt to give up at the first sign of difficulty. Their efficacy beliefs serve as barriers to their ability to solve problem.

Anxiety is a crucial concept when discussing burnout. Burnout refers to a condition caused by chronic emotional and interpersonal work stressors (Maslach, Schaufeli, & Leiter, 2001). Lazarus and Folkman (1984) defined anxiety as a "provocative relationship between the person and the environment that is appraised by the person as taxing or exceeding his or her resources and endangering his or her well-being." (p. 19). Burnout and anxiety are related to chronic tedium in the workplace. They further explained that anxiety is therefore caused by psychological stress when the individual either feels that an anticipated satisfaction might not be fulfilled.

Studies (Maslach et al., 2001; Ogundayo, 1996) have consistently shown that men generally report less anxiety than women. This gender difference is also seen during childhood. Girls tend to report a greater number of anxieties than boys, regardless of age. What males and females find as anxiety-provoking seems to differ as well (Ogundayo, 1996). According to McNeil, Ries, & Turk (1995) women express more environmental and agoraphobic fears, distress about small animals, and concern about sexual and aggressive scenes than men.

Research Questions

The following research question were answered in the study:

1. What is the joint effect of aggressive behaviour, perceived self efficacy, state anxiety (independent variables) on the burnout among the student union leaders in tertiary institutions?
2. What is the relative effect of aggressive behaviour, perceived self-efficacy, state anxiety on the burnout among the student union leaders in tertiary institutions?

Methodology

This study employed survey research design. The reason for this is that the research examined variables that are in existence and require observations. The researcher collected data which quantitatively measured aggressive behaviour, perceived self efficacy and state anxiety as they influence burnout among students union leaders in tertiary institutions. For the purposes of this study, the variables were not manipulated.

The target population comprised student union leaders in three selected Institutions in Abuja city, which include University of Abuja, FCT College of Education, Zuba and Abuja Polytechnic, Bwari, Abuja. The student union leaders were identified from the members of Student Union Government (SUG) in the three schools. This also included student leaders in the Faculty and Departmental associations. One hundred and fifty (150) student union leaders were selected from the SUG, Faculty and Department respectively through stratified random sampling from the three tertiary institutions. The mean age of the students was 26.31 (SD = 6.72).

The following research instruments were used:

(i) Personal Aggression Report Scale

The Personal Aggression Report Scale is adapted from Personal Report of Communication Apprehension-24 (PRCA) by Levine and McCroskey (1990) and McCroskey, Beatty, Kearney, and Plax (1985). The scale is a self-report paper and pencil instrument used to measure communication apprehension (an individual's level of fear or anxiety with one or more other persons) in students above the tenth grade.

The administration time is approximately 15 minutes (McCroskey, 1982a). Consisting of 24 items on a 5-point likert scale, the choices for answers range from Strongly Agree to Strongly Disagree. This 24-item instrument assesses individuals' level of fear or anxiety across a variety of contexts including group discussions, meetings, interpersonal conversations, and public speaking. It also provides an overall score. Using a data sample of over 25,000 college and university students, McCroskey, Beatty, and Kearney (1985) found the mean and standard deviation for the PRCA-24, 65.60 and 15.30, respectively. The alpha reliability for the instrument was approximately 0.97. Similar studies have confirmed these findings (Bourhis, Allen, & Wells, 1993; Booth-Butterfield, & Booth-Butterfield, 1993).

(ii) The General Self-Efficacy Scale

The German version of the General Self-Efficacy (GSE) scale was originally developed by Matthias Jerusalem and Ralf Schwarzer in 1979. This instrument contained 20 items. In 1981 it was reduced to 10 items and subsequently adapted to 28 languages (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1995). A typical item is, "Thanks to my resourcefulness, I can handle unforeseen situations". The GSE scale has been used in numerous research projects, where it typically yielded internal consistencies between alpha of 0.75 and 0.91. Its stability has been examined in several longitudinal studies. For example, 246 cardiac surgery patients in Germany who filled out the questionnaire before surgery and again half a year later, had a retest-reliability of $r = 0.67$ (Schröder et al., 1998). Among 140 teachers in Germany, a stability coefficient of $r = 0.75$ was found after one year. Over the same time period, 2,846 students, also in Germany, filled out the scale twice, whereby a retest-reliability of $r = 0.55$ was found (Schwarzer & Jerusalem, 1999). In addition, for a two-year period, there were coefficients of $r = 0.47$ for men and $r = 0.63$ for women who had left East Germany as refugees (Schwarzer, Hahn & Jerusalem, 1993).

(iii) State Anxiety Inventory

Another instrument used in carrying out the research is an adapted form of State-Trait Anxiety Inventory (STAI) constructed by Spielberger, Gorsuch & Lushene (1970). This is a self evaluation questionnaire

measuring state anxiety – a transitory condition of perceived tension, and trait anxiety – a relatively stable condition of anxiety proneness.

The scale contains twenty (20 items) which represent the state anxiety. The STAI has been validated in Nigeria by Awaritefe and Kadiri (1981) and it returned a correlation coefficient of 0.60. This shows that the instrument is valid.

(iv) The Maslach Burnout Inventory (MBI).

This measuring instrument, developed by Maslach, Jackson and Leiter (1996) is a 22-item questionnaire designed to assess the three central aspects of burnout: emotional exhaustion, depersonalisation and decreased sense of personal accomplishment. The MBI has Cronbach’s alpha reliability coefficients of 0.90 for the Emotional Exhaustion subscale, 0.79 for Depersonalisation and 0.71 for Personal Accomplishment (Maslach, Jackson & Leiter, 1996). It has been used widely with mental health professionals.

The Multiple Regression Analysis and its derivatives were used to analyse the data.

Results

Table 1: Descriptive Statistics And Intercorrelations Among The Variables

| Variables | Mean | SD | Burnout | X1 | X2 | X3 |
|----------------------|-------|-------|----------|--------|-------|-------|
| Burnout | 54.35 | 15.92 | 1.000 | | | |
| Aggressive behaviour | 39.81 | 10.85 | 0.246** | .1.000 | | |
| Self efficacy | 30.20 | 4.68 | -0.360** | 0.026 | 1.000 | |
| State anxiety | 28.70 | 5.44 | 0.362** | 0.077 | 0.046 | 1.000 |

N = 150, ** P<0.001.

Table 1 shows descriptive statistics and intercorrelations among the study's variables. As revealed in the table, burnout was positively correlated with aggressive behaviour ($r = 0.246$; $p < 0.05$) and state anxiety ($r = 0.362$; $p < 0.05$) but negatively correlated with self-efficacy of the study participants ($r = -0.360$; $p < 0.05$). This implies that aggressive behaviour and anxiety always lead to burnout. Conversely, the negative correlation between self efficacy and burnout showed that self efficacy did not move in the same direction with burnout.

Table 2: Multiple Regression Analysis on the Burnout Data

| Multiple R (adjusted) = 0.540 Multiple R ² (adjusted) = 0.261 Standard Error of Estimate = 6.31 | | | | | | |
|--|---------------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------|-----|
| Analysis of Variance | | | | | | |
| | Sum of Squares (SS) | df | Mean Square | F | Sig | P |
| Regression | 1960.332 | 3 | 653.444 | 21.035 | 0.000 | Sig |
| Residual | 644.424 | 146 | 26.197 | | | |
| Total | 8404.755 | 150 | | | | |

The table above shows that the independent variables (aggressive behaviour, self efficacy and state anxiety) when pulled together have significant effect on the students union leaders' burnout $R = 0.540$, $P < .05$. The combination of the variables accounted for 26.1% variance (R^2 adjusted = 0.261) in the prediction of burnout among the student union leaders. The analysis of variance from multiple regression yielded an F-ratio value of 21.035 and was found to be significant at 0.05 level.

Table 3: Relative Contributions of the Independent Variables to the prediction

| MODEL | Unstandardized | | Standardized Coefficients | t | P |
|------------|----------------|------------|---------------------------|------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | |
| Constant | 33.735 | 2.521 | | 8.30 | <0.05 |
| Aggressive | 0.371 | 0.083 | 0.270 | 4.46 | <0.05 |

| | | | | | |
|----------------------|--------------|--------------|--------------|-------------|-----------------|
| behaviour | | | | | |
| Self efficacy | 0.261 | 0.093 | 0.182 | 2.73 | <0.05 |
| State anxiety | 0.182 | 0.060 | 0.263 | 3.38 | <0.05 |

The above table showed that each of the independent variables made significant contribution to the prediction of burnout among the student union leaders. The table further revealed that aggressive behaviour made the most significant contribution (Beta = 0.270; t = 4.46; P < 0.05) to the prediction of burnout. Other variables made significant contributions in the following order: state anxiety (Beta = 0.263; t = 3.38; P < 0.05) and self efficacy (Beta = .182; t = 2.73; P < 0.05).

Discussion

This study was designed to examine the influence of aggressive behaviour, self- efficacy and state anxiety on burnout of student union leaders in tertiary institutions. Results suggest that aggressive behaviour, self-efficacy and state anxiety may predispose students union leaders to burnout.

The result of the first research question revealed that the three independent variables have joint effect on the burnout of the participants. The extent to which the three variables affected burnout was reflected in the value of R = 0.483 and R² (adjusted) = 0.224. The result thus demonstrated that 22.4% of the variance in the burnout of the students’ union leaders of tertiary institutions is accounted for by the linear combination of the three variables. The result was further strengthened by the value of F-ratio (F = 24.944, P < 0.05). This implies that the results signifying the capacity of the three independent variables to predict student union leaders’ burnout could not have happened by chance. This finding is in consonance with the work of previous researchers (Okun, 2002; Chesney-Lind & Brown, 1999; Silverthorn & Frick, 1999; Stajkovic & Luthans, 1998; Daly, 1986; Booth-Butterfield, 1986; Male & May, 1997, 1998).

Furthermore, burnout correlated with: Aggressive behaviour (r = 0.246; p < 0.05), self efficacy (r = 0.360; p < 0.05); and state anxiety (r = 0.362; p < 0.05). There were also significant correlations among the

three independent variables. This means that each of the independent variables has significant correlations with burnout among the student union leaders. The table further revealed that aggressive behaviour made the most significant contribution (Beta = 0.270; $t = 4.46$; $p < 0.05$) to the prediction. Other variables made significant contributions in the following order: state anxiety (Beta = 0.263; $t = 3.38$; $P < 0.05$) and self efficacy (Beta = 0.182; $t = 2.73$; $P < 0.05$).

The significant impact of aggressive behaviour on the student union leaders' burnout is best understood when it is realized that most students are at their late adolescent stage and they are restless. All these could lead to burnout and stress among the students. It should be known and noted that the development of self-efficacy is rooted in learning by observation and direct personal experience (vicarious learning) in a wide spectra of context. Consequently, programmes design to improve the quality of education should lay emphasis on giving students the opportunities to participate in school activities and decision-making.

By the same token, Seeman (1996), stated that the estrogens are neuroprotective with respect to neuronal degeneration, growth, and susceptibility to toxins. The cyclic fluctuations of estrogens and progesterone enhance the response to stress, which confers susceptibility to depression and anxiety. In the present researchers' opinion, the anxiety score of any given person is the end product of both biological and psychosocial factors and their interaction. Therefore, there is a strong link between anxiety and burnout scores.

Conclusion and Recommendations

This study demonstrated that aggressive behaviour, perceived self-efficacy, and state anxiety serve as predictors of student union leaders' burnout. It was recommended that training should be given to students on life skills to be able to cope with burnout stressors and challenges of life. Also, government's effort at curbing problems in the educational sector will be more fruitful if the services of educational psychologists and counsellors are utilized. When these groups of specialists are consulted, they are not likely to provide cosmetic solution to the problems as they will first diagnose the problems before attempting any remediation. The findings of this study, for instance, can serve as a basis for seeking solution to the menace of students' unrest in tertiary

institutions in Nigeria. Government must also provide enough funds to assist in carrying out study of this nature and to implement its recommendations. The findings of this study can help in promoting healthy education in a healthy environment. If educational planners and policy makers take cognizance of the fact that students' burnout can be reduced, then they can organize workshops where people involved in school matter (especially school authorities and lecturers) are trained and tutored on how to effectively do this to make room for enhanced overall performance as well as reduce incidence of students' restiveness which are ignited by students' unionism.

The researcher recommends that more students should seek assistance from professional counselors to solve their problems rather than keep their problems to themselves. Students should also seek assistance to help improve or manage their aggressive behaviour, self efficacy, state anxiety and burnout. A regular stress and burnout management programme can foster professional growth and development, decrease students' aggressive behaviour, and provide them with strategies and tools to combat low self efficacy and anxiety that build maladaptive cognitive patterns leading to burnout

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