***Original Research Article***

**Perceived Stress, Sex, and Quality of Life Among Academic University Staff in Lagos State: An Empirical Analysis**

**ABSTRACT**

*Quality of life (QOL) is a crucial public concern, especially among academic university staff as it influences not only their personal life but also their overall productivity in workplace. This cross-sectional study, utilizing a multistage sampling technique, investigates the influence of perceived stress and sex on QoL among academic university staff in Lagos State. The study is grounded in the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model and Lazarus' Transactional Model of Stress and Coping, highlighting how work-related stressors influence QoL. Using a sample of 321 participants (203 males and 118 females), it was hypothesized that perceived stress will negatively influence quality of life and that male academic staff will significantly report higher quality of life than female academic staff. The study revealed a significant negative influence of perceived stress on quality of life (β = -.390; t=-7.573; P <.05). furthermore, the study revealed that although male academic staff reported higher quality of life, it isn’t statistically significant (t= 1.38, df (319), P>.05). The study recommended that academic institutions in Lagos should implement specific policies to mitigate perceived stress among academic staff, universities should partner with local mental health to provide culturally sensitive stress management programs.*

 ***Keywords:*** Quality of Life, Perceived Stress, Sex, Academic staff.

**INTRODUCTION**

Quality of life is defined by the World Health Organisation (WHO), (2021) as a person's assessment of their status in life within the context of the culture and value systems in which they exist, as well as in relation to their objectives, expectations, standards, and worries. This definition emphasises how subjective quality of life (QoL) is, focussing on personal opinions and the impact of social, psychological and cultural variables. Nagyova et al., (2007) described Quality of life as a holistic measure encompassing various domains of well-being, including physical health, psychological satisfaction, social relationships, and environmental factors. Quality of life according to Diener et al., (1999) refers to the overall well-being of individuals and societies, encompassing both objective and subjective measures of physical, mental, and social health. It goes beyond mere material wealth and incorporates physical health, mental well-being, social relationships, and overall satisfaction with life. Mental health is increasingly recognized as a crucial aspect of QoL, positive mental health involves emotional resilience, coping skills, and the ability to maintain satisfying relationships. Mental illnesses, stress, anxiety, and depression can substantially impair an individual's QoL (Keyes, 2005). Social interactions are another significant aspect of quality of life (QoL). Since humans are social organisms by nature, social ties are essential in determining QoL. Strong social support networks, meaningful connections with family and friends, and community engagement contribute to overall well-being. On the other hand, loneliness and social isolation have a negative impact on quality of life and are linked to poor health outcomes (Holt-Lunstad et al., 2015).

The pursuit of improved quality of life has emerged as a primary objective for people, communities, and lawmakers alike as societies change. In the world of higher education institutions, academic university staff members play multifaceted roles that extend beyond traditional teaching responsibilities. In academia, staff members face significant stress due to workload, administrative responsibilities, and research expectations, which can negatively affect their QoL (Bozionelos, 2017), of which these demands may affect their QoL in different ways (Bashir, 2018). Academic university staff members, including professors, researchers, and administrators, frequently deal with high levels of job stress, lengthy workdays, and tremendous pressure to perform well in their administrative, teaching, and research responsibilities (Barker & Gower, 2010). These stressors have a substantial influence on their entire quality of life and well-being. For academic university staff, QoL is intricately linked to their perception of how stressful a situation is and their ability to navigate these stressors effectively while maintaining a sense of fulfilment and balance across personal and professional domains.

Perceived stress is the extent to which people evaluate events in their lives as stressful, overpowering, or unmanageable (Cohen et al., 1983). It is a subjective assessment of how stressful things in one's life are seen to be. According to Cohen et al. (1983), an individual's perception of stress results from their evaluation of the demands placed on them by their surroundings and their ability to meet those expectations. Perceived stress was also described by Lazarus and Folkman (1984) as the cognitive assessment of challenging circumstances and the individual's subjective assessment of their capacity to handle them. All these various definitions of perceived stress highlight the complex nature of perceived stress, emphasizing its cognitive appraisal, feelings of overwhelm or inability to cope, and the influence of individual interpretations and resources.

Perceived stress from various stressors can have negative effects on QoL, as it can lead to psychological distress, physical illness, and reduced coping skills (Cohen et al., 1983), it can also affect the academic performance and engagement of university staff, as it can interfere with their motivation, concentration, and creativity (Chen et al., 2023), physical symptoms like headaches and exhaustion, mental issues like worry and sadness, and behavioural changes like trouble sleeping or social disengagement are just a few of the ways it might show itself ([Hobfoll, 1989; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984]). The Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model further posits that occupational stress arises from high job demands coupled with insufficient resources, leading to burnout and diminished QoL (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Lazarus' Transactional Model of Stress and Coping emphasizes that stress impacts QoL depending on an individual’s coping mechanisms.

In the academic context, university staff face various stressors including heavy workloads, time pressures, pressure to publish research, administrative burdens, and interpersonal conflicts, which can affect their overall well-being and job satisfaction (Chan, 2015). The challenges inherent in academia, including tight deadlines, funding constraints, administrative pressures, and the pursuit of scholarly excellence, contribute to heightened stress levels among academic university staffs (Koutsimani et al., 2019). Studies have shown that academic staff are particularly susceptible to these negative outcomes, highlighting the importance of understanding their stress levels and potential interventions (Mantzourani et al., 2018), as perceived stress has emerged as a significant concern among academic staff members globally, with implications for their well-being and professional effectiveness (El Ansari et al., 2020).

The quality of life among academic university staff in Lagos State is crucial due to its impact on their overall well-being, productivity, job satisfaction, and effectiveness in teaching and mentoring students. However, perceived stress has emerged as a significant concern, with academic staff facing numerous stressors such as administrative pressure, tight deadlines, and the demand to publish articles. Coupled with professional stressors, the environment in Lagos itself worsens the issue, known for its busy, crowded as well as its stressful nature, Lagos poses additional challenges, particularly for academic staff who lack personal transportation, as they must contend with the daily struggle of securing public transportation during working hours. Even those with personal vehicles are not immune to the stress, as they frequently face the challenges of heavy traffic. These stressors collectively diminish their quality of life, negatively impacting their efficiency as educators and affecting their personal lives.

Quality of life for academic staff can be comprehensively understood through the lens of Bronfenbrenner's Ecological Systems Theory. Developed by Bronfenbrenner (1979), this theory emphasizes the interplay between an individual and their environment across multiple systems. According to the theory, an individual development is influenced by various interconnected systems, ranging from the microsystem (individual's immediate environment) to the macrosystem (cultural and societal values). The immediate setting in which academic staff members interact directly is the microsystem, which is the initial system. Colleagues, students, family members, academic departments, and the university campus are all included. Within this system, factors such as workload, work-life balance, interpersonal relationships, and support mechanisms significantly impact the quality of life of academic staff (Parker, 2019). The interconnections between several microsystems in a person's life make up their mesosystem. This entails balancing work and personal life for academic staff members. Conflicting demands between professional responsibilities (e.g., publishing pressures) and familial roles—particularly for female staff balancing patriarchal household expectations (Ezepue et al., 2024)—compound stress. The exosystem includes environments that have an indirect impact on an individual's experiences but in which they do not actively engage. This includes institutional policies, funding structures, and societal attitudes towards academia. For instance, budget cuts, lack of institutional support, and academic competition can contribute to job dissatisfaction and reduced quality of life among academic staff (Hancock & Kay, 2016).

The macrosystem represents the broader cultural, social, and economic context in which academic institutions operate. Cultural norms, governmental policies, and societal values shape the expectations and experiences of academic staff. For example, prevailing attitudes towards academia, tenure systems, and academic freedom influence job satisfaction and career trajectories (Austin, 2002). The chronosystem which is the last system emphasizes the temporal dimension of human development, including historical events and life transitions. Changes in academic policies, technological advancements, and economic fluctuations can impact the quality of life of academic staff over time. likewise, perceptions of job satisfaction and well-being are influenced by changes in one's career and life stage (e.g., tenure evaluation, family obligations) (Kinman & Jones, 2003). Obiso (2023) conducted a study which delved into the intricate interplay between perceived stress, happiness, and overall quality of life among older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic. Employing a mixed-method approach, the researchers administered a standard questionnaire to 100 participants, supplemented by open-ended inquiries to elucidate the factors contributing to stress and happiness during the survey period. The findings of the study revealed a negative correlation between perceived stress and indicators of well-being among older adults. Specifically, the results indicated that higher levels of perceived stress were associated with lower levels of happiness and life satisfaction. While the correlations between stress and happiness, and stress and life satisfaction were low, the relationship between life satisfaction and stress exhibited a moderate correlation. Amjadi et al., (2022) in their study of frontline nurses in Mazandaran University of Medical sciences, indicated a consistent negative association between perceived stress and various domains of QOL, including physical health (mean score: 57.71), psychological well-being (mean score: 44.3), social relationships (mean score: 45.61), environmental satisfaction (mean score: 47.6), and overall perception of QOL (mean score: 52.95). Correlation coefficients ranged from moderate to strong negative correlations, emphasizing the detrimental impact of perceived stress on nurses' well-being across multiple dimensions. Furthermore, multiple linear regression analyses from the study underscored the significance of perceived stress as a predictor of QOL, alongside demographic factors such as gender, age, and marital status. Higher levels of perceived stress were notably prevalent among female (61.8%), middle-aged (aged between 41 and 50 years old), and married (70.2%) nurses, correlating with lower QOL scores across all domains.

Lagos State, with its urban challenges such as traffic congestion and infrastructural limitations, exacerbates these stressors for academic staff, further diminishing their QoL. While prior research has established a negative relationship between perceived stress and QoL across various professions (Amjadi et al., 2022; Obiso, 2023), limited studies explore this relationship among academic staff in Lagos State, where socio-economic and institutional factors compound stress experiences. This study seeks to address this gap by examining how perceived stress influences QoL and whether sex moderates this relationship.

The central objectives addressed in this research are;

1. To investigate the extent to which perceived stress influence the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos State.
2. Investigate the extent to which sex influences the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos State.

The following hypotheses were formulated to test the identified aims and objectives of this current study.

1. Perceived stress will negatively predict the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state.
2. Female academic staff will report significantly lower quality of life than male counterparts, attributable to gendered household responsibilities and workplace discrimination prevalent in Nigeria’s patriarchal society.

**Operational Definition of Terms**

**Quality of Life:** This is referred to as an individual's perception of their overall satisfaction with all aspect of their life in relation to their goals, expectations, standards, and concerns, as measured by the WHOQOL-BREF developed by the World Health Organization (1995).

**Perceived Stress:** This refers to an individual's subjective assessment and interpretation of the pressure and demands of various situations in their life, involving a personal evaluation of how intense and significant these challenges, which is as measured using the Perceived stress scale developed by Cohen et al., (1983).

**Academic Staff:** This refers to the lecturers and other professionals employed by universities and other institutions of higher learning to teach students.

**University:** This is an institution of higher education and research that grants academic degrees in a variety of disciplines, and also providing a comprehensive range of undergraduate, graduate, and postgraduate programs, including professional degrees and doctoral programs.

**Sex:** Thisrefers to the biological and physiological characteristics that distinguish males and female

**METHODOLOGY**

**Research Design**

This study utilized a cross-sectional research design to investigate the influence of perceived stress and sex on the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state. This design has been chosen as it enables the simultaneous sampling of all variables of interest among the participants. Additionally, it affords the researcher the opportunity to collect data from various segments of the population within a limited timeframe. In the study, perceived stress and demographic variable (Sex) served as independent variables, while quality of life served as the dependent variable.

**Study Population and Location**

The study was be carried out across three universities in Lagos state. The study population included academic staff from each of the aforementioned universities, comprising of both male and female academic staff members across various age, all employed to teach at these universities.

**Sample and Sampling Technique**

This study utilized a multistage sampling technique, beginning with the selection of three tertiary schools across Lagos State using a convenient sampling method. Subsequently, participant selection from each of the universities for this study employed a purposive sampling technique. This approach focused on recruiting staff members employed in universities across Lagos State who meet specific criteria relevant to the study; to be an academic staff as at the time of data collection. Due to financial constraints limiting the ability to reach a larger sample, the study utilized a sample size of 321 academic staff.

**Measures**

The data was collected using a standardised questionnaire which was divided into three sections.

**Demographic variables:** This included items measuring demographic information such as sex and name of institution

**Quality of Life Scale:** This was measured using the 26 items Quality of Life Scale (QOLS), created originally by American psychologist John Flanagan in the 1970's, adapted by World health organization. The World Health Organization Quality of Life (WHOQOL) is a quality-of-life assessment developed by the WHOQOL Group with fifteen international field centres, simultaneously, in an attempt to develop a quality of life assessment that would be applicable cross-culturally. Each individual item of the WHOQOL-BREF is scored from 1 to 5 on a response scale, which is stipulated as a five-point ordinal scale. The reliability of the WHOQOL-BREF was evaluated using Cronbach's alpha coefficient. Cronbach's alpha coefficient for the whole WHOQOL-BREF scale was 0.83.

**Perceived Stress Scale:** This was measured using the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS) which is a 14-item self-report measure designed to assess “the degree to which situations in one’s life are appraised as stressful” (Cohen, Kamarck, & Mermelstein, 1983). Individuals rate items on a 5-point Likert scale, ranging from 0 - “Never” to 4 - “Very often" in which item 4, 5, 6, 7, 9, 10, and 13 are reversed scored. Scores range from 0-56. The instrument was found to have good internal consistency ranging with a Cronbach’s alpha of 0.74.

**Data Collection Procedure**

The researchers transformed the structured questionnaire into two formats: a physical hard-copy and an online soft copy via Google Form for administration. Next, the researchers went to each of the study setting approaching academic staff through various means to request their participation in the study. Some were engaged privately in their offices, others were approached informally at the staff clubs of their respective universities, and a few were openly addressed on campus. Since the researchers was unfamiliar with the environments of some universities, undergraduate students from these institutions assisted by serving as guides. They helped the researchers navigate the campus and directed them to the offices of different academic staff. Simultaneously, the questionnaire in Google Form, was also being distributed to eligible academic staff in each of the specified settings. For interested participant, it took an average of 10 minutes to complete the physical questionnaire and approximately 6 minutes to complete the online questionnaire. The researchers spent a month on field to administer the questionnaires. Throughout the process of data collection, the researchers ensured that the confidentiality and anonymity of the participants were maintained throughout the study, and participants were informed of their right to withdraw, on no account were any of the participants forced to fill the questionnaire, informing them that participation is voluntary. No incentives were provided. The researchers were able to administer 320 physical questionnaires. Out of the 320 filled questionnaires, only 307 was properly filled and valid. The researchers also got 14 responses from the online questionnaire, making it a total of 321 valid responses which was then used for further analysis in the study.

**Data Analysis**

Data analysis was carried out using Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS), version 25. Descriptive statistics such as the mean (standard deviation) and frequency (percentages) depicted the socio-demographic variables and scores on the study measures. Hypothesis 1 was tested using a simple linear regression, and Hypothesis 2 was tested using independent sample t-test. All statistical analyses were 1-tailed, and the level of statistical significance was set at a p-value less than 0.05.

**RESULTS**

**Table 1: Descriptive statistics**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| Demographic variables | N | Percent | Mean | SD |
| **Sex** |  |  |  |  |
|  Male | 203 | 63.2 |  |  |
|  Female | 118 | 36.8 |  |  |
| **Age** | 321 |  | 45.5 | 11.2 |
| **Institution** |  |  |  |  |
|  LASU | 151 | 47.0 |  |  |
|  UNILAG | 73 | 22.7 |  |  |
|  LASUED | 97 | 30.2 |  |  |

The study participants consisted of 321 academic staff, with 203 males (63.2%) and 118 females (36.8%). 151 respondents (47%) were from LASU 73 (22.7%) were from the UNILAG, and 97 (30.2%) were from LASUED. The age range of the total participants is 25-71, with a mean age of 45.5 and a standard deviation of 11.2.

**Table 2: Pearson correlation analysis**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Variables** | **Quality of Life** | **Perceived Stress** | **Age** | **Sex** |
| **Quality of Life** | **1.00** | **-0.390 (p= .000)** | 0.046(p=.416) | -0.077(p=.168) |
| **Perceived Stress** | **-0.390** **(p= .000)** | **1.00** | 0.002(p=.967) | 0.048 (p = .392) |
| **Age** | 0.046 (p = .416) | 0.002 (p = .967) | **1.00** | **-0.163 (p = .003)** |
| **Sex** | -0.077 (p= .168) | 0.048 (p = .392) | **-0.163 (p=.003)** | **1.00** |

The pearson correlation matrix above shows that Perceived stress has a significant negative correlation with quality of life (r = -0.390, p < .05), indicating that as stress increases, quality of life decreases. It also shows that age does not significantly correlate with quality of life (r = 0.046, p = .416). From the table, it could be observed that sex is negatively correlated with age (r = -0.163, p = .003).

**Hypothesis 1:** Perceived stress will negatively predict the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state. This hypothesis was tested using a simple linear, and the result is presented in the table below;

**Table 3: Summary Table of Simple Linear Regression Showing Independent Influence of Perceived Stress on Quality of Life of Academic University Staff in Lagos State.**

|  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Unstandardized coefficient | Standardized Coefficient |  |  |
| Variable | B | Std. Error | β | t | Sig |
| (constant) | 112.988 | 3.259 |  | 34.666 | .000 |
| Perceived Stress | -.737 | .097 | -.390 | -7.573 | .000 |

**R2 = .152; R=.390**

The result from the table above shows that there is significant influence of perceived stress on the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state (β = -.390; t=-7.573; P <.05). Furthermore, it can be observed that perceived stress contributed 15.2% of changes observed in the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state, meaning 15.2% of the variance that occurred in the reported quality of life was attributed to perceived stress which is statistically significant. In addition, the table also revealed that the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state decrease by **.737** for every unit increase in the level of perceived stress, indicating a negative influence of perceived stress on quality of life, which means that as perceived stress increases, quality of life decreases. Therefore, the stated hypothesis is hereby accepted.

**Hypothesis 2:** Male academic university staff will report higher quality of life than female academic university staff in Lagos state. This hypothesis was tested using an independent sample t-test, and the result is presented in the table below;

**Table 4: Summary Table of Independent Sample T-Test Showing Influence of Sex on Quality of Life of Academic University Staff in Lagos State.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
|  | Sex | N | Mean | Std | df | t-value | Sig |
| Quality of Life | Male | 203 | 89.30 | 10.89 | 319 | 1.38 | .168 |
| Female | 118 | 87.58 | 10.61 |

From the table above it could be observed that there is no significant mean difference between the quality of life of male academic university staff (Mean= 89.30) and the quality-of-life female academic university staff (Mean= 87.58) in Lagos state (t= 1.38, df (319), P>.05). This rejects the stated rejected.

**DISCUSSION**

The findings of this study revealed that the quality of life of academic staff in Lagos state is negatively influenced by perceived stress, indicating that as the level of perceived stress of academic staff increases, their quality-of-life decreases. This finding is consistent with the study of Amjadi et al. (2022) on nurses which revealed how perceived stress detrimentally affects multiple dimensions of quality of life, including physical health, psychological well-being, social relationships, and environmental satisfaction. In the current study, perceived stress contributed significantly to the observed variance in quality of life, illustrating a broad impact similar to what was observed in frontline nurses. This consistency across professions suggests that perceived stress universally undermines quality of life, regardless of occupation. This result also aligns with that of Obiso (2023), who examined the relationship between perceived stress and well-being among older adults and found a negative correlation between stress and both happiness and life satisfaction. Though the population and context differ (older adults during the COVID-19 pandemic vs. academic university staff), the key takeaway is consistent: higher levels of perceived stress are associated with lower levels of well-being. Similarly, in the current study, perceived stress significantly affects the quality of life of university staff, with every unit increase in stress resulting in a reduction in their quality of life, further reinforcing that stress is a critical determinant of well-being.

Furthermore, this finding reinforces the findings of Kim et al. (2015), their study found that severe fatigue and job stress were linked to lower quality of life scores, much like the current study's finding of a negative impact of perceived stress on the academic staff’s quality of life. Similarly, Silva et al. (2020) found that stress related to nursing assistance predicted the physical and psychological domains of quality of life. In academia, work-related stress, including workload, deadlines, and administrative pressures, may similarly degrade university staff’s quality of life. This shows that the result support a broader body of existing literature which consistently reveal that perceived stress negatively influences quality of life across diverse professional and demographic groups.

The study also revealed that sex does not influence the quality of academic university staff in Lagos state. The study revealed that despite the fact that male academic staff reported higher quality of life than female academic staff, however, the difference is not statistically significant enough to conclude that male academic staff have definitively higher quality of life than female academic staff in Lagos state. This result is in line with the cross-sectional observational study of Csuka et al. (2024) using patients diagnosed with various forms of cancer, their study revealed that there was no statistically significant difference between the quality of life of male cancer patients and female cancer patients, with psychological variables like family support playing a larger role than sociodemographic factors for both male and female patients. This result is also consistent with the findings by Yaşartürk et al. (2019) demonstrated that there is no significant difference between the quality of life of males and females, suggesting that institutional and environmental factors within universities play a more crucial role in shaping quality of life than sex alone. However, this result is also against the study of Ezepue et al. (2024), which investigated health related habits and lifestyle among university students and found that sex differences significantly affect sleep quality and living conditions, influencing quality of life outcomes, whereby female students reported higher stress levels, partially attributed to balancing family and academic responsibilities.

The findings of the study have significant implications for intervention. The study reflects the need for academic institutions in Lagos state implements specific policies to mitigate perceived stress among academic staff. For instance, the Lagos State Ministry of Education, alongside relevant university administrations, can create clear guidelines on workload balance, teaching assignments, and research demands. Given the multiple roles academic staff often undertake, there should be structured support systems like reduced administrative burdens, a more flexible timeline for research publication pressures, and realistic performance expectations. Collaborations with organizations such as the National Universities Commission (NUC) or local unions like the Academic Staff Union of Universities (ASUU) can promote dialogues on workload reforms and ensure that policies are effectively implemented. In other to address the negative impact of perceived stress on academic university staff’s quality of life, universities should partner with local mental health organizations such as Mentally Aware Nigeria Initiative (MANI) and The Sunshine Series to provide culturally sensitive stress management programs. These programs should focus on helping academic staff adopt stress-relieving techniques tailored to their specific work environment, such as mindfulness practices, peer support groups, and emotional resilience workshops. Regular wellness seminars that are attuned to the specific stressors of academia, like navigating institutional politics or dealing with demanding workloads, should be incorporated into the university’s annual calendar.

**CONCLUSION**

In this article, the researchers aim were to study the influence of perceived stress and sex on the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state. Based on the findings made in this study, the researcher was able to draw the following conclusions from the research objectives; the study revealed that quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state is influenced negatively by perceived stress, the result further revealed that sex difference doesn’t significantly influence the quality of life of academic university staff in Lagos state.

**LIMITATIONS**

The study encountered several limitations that may affect the interpretation and generalizability of the findings. First, the scope of the study and the selection of variables were limited, which could limit the depth of insights derived. Two of the universities selected were on break during the data collection period, leading to limited access to academic staff and resulting in a smaller sample size from these institutions. Additionally, Future studies could look into other factors (such as social support, work life balance, etc.) contributing to academic staff’s quality of life.

**Data Availability Status**

Data are available on request due to privacy and other restrictions. The data that supports the findings are available on request from the corresponding Author.

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