

Full Length Research Paper

Job burnout and coping strategies among extension officers in North west province, South Africa

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A simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 extension officers to examine the incidence of job burnout and coping strategies in North West Province, South Africa. Data were collected with a structured questionnaire and analyzed using frequency counts, percentages and multiple regression analysis. The results show that majority of the extension officers were male (52.5%) with the mean age of 42.5 years, married (72.5%) and 82.5% were Christians. Eighty-five percent of the extension officer had Diploma as their educational qualification and a mean of 14 years as working experience. The result revealed that extension officers experiences 29 out of the listed 44 job burnout symptoms, which include cynicism/negativism (1.87) agitation (1.85) accident proneness (1.75) and loss of patience (1.72). The most prominent coping strategies as indicated by extension officers were maintaining an active personal social life outside of work (2.50), maintaining healthy relationship with co-workers (2.47), development of structural and personal support system (2.45) and maintaining healthy relationship with superior officers (2.47). Significant determinants of job burnout were gender ($t = 2.46$), educational level ($t = -3.02$), studying for higher degree ($t = -2.30$) and number of farmers covered ($t = -2.20$). The study recommends that extension officers should be exposed to training and techniques to cope with job burnout.

Key words: South Africa, extension officers, stress, job burnout, coping strategies.

INTRODUCTION

Agricultural improvement in South Africa, especially among small scale and resource-poor farmers, requires a major effort to improve the quality of extension services available to farmers. DoA (2008) reported that currently, the Extension Recovery Plan (ERP) is being implemented in all the nine provinces in the country. This is predicated on the fact that agricultural extension bridges the gap between available technology and farmers' practices through the provision of technical advice, information and training. Without these, farmers' ability to adopt new technologies and plant varieties, which would benefit their production and incomes, would be limited. South African farmers receive much advice and information from other farmers and/or private input suppliers, and many also benefit from radio and television programmes, agricultural trade magazines, shows and demonstrations. For many small scale and resource-poor

farmers, public extension represents the main source of information on improved technology. It also provides access to other opportunities for agricultural improvement through links to training, research, sources of input supplies and, possibly, markets. DoA (2007) noted that the national norms and standard for extension service delivery in South Africa states that provinces are expected to provide extension and advisory services to a wide range of clients and such services should be guided by a wide range of government priority programmes/projects. The effectiveness of extension is dependent upon the motivation of its employees (Buford, 1990). Knowing what motivates employees and incorporating this knowledge into the reward system will help extension managers identify, recruit, employ, train, and retain a productive workforce. However, a major problem facing extension service delivery is high attrition rate among extension agents and consequently low extension agent farmers' ratio. Extension agents still continue to leave extension services prematurely, despite the attention research has paid to the issue of employee turnover (Strong and Harder, 2009). The extent to which people

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Table 1. Personal characteristics of extension officers.

Personal characteristics	Description
Gender	Predominantly male 52.5%
Age	Mean = 42.5 years SD = 5.40
Marital status	72.5% married
Religion	Predominantly christianity 82.5%, free thinkers 25%
Educational level	Predominantly diploma 85% , BSc =12.5%
Household size	Mean = 4.2 persons SD = 1.20
Working experience	Mean = 14 years SD = 4.50
Living in job location	Predominantly Yes 85% , No 15%
Job designation	Predominantly extension officer 43%, Senior/Chief agricultural technicians 57%

are satisfied with their work has been of enduring research interest. An increasing concern with the meaning of work and the belief that the degree of satisfaction at work is related to aspects of work behavior such as productivity, absenteeism, turnover rates, intention to quit and job burnout (Bedeian, 1993). Increasing level of emotional and physical stress experienced by persons involved in human services has continued to attract research attention. Working conditions and circumstances have been noted to exert significant effects on other aspects of the workers lives (Ajayi and Anagenyi, 2001).

The prevailing situation of low ratio of extension agents to farmers would result in work overload. The enormous demand on extension agents by the clientele and the institutions they serve would predispose them to frustrations and stress (Kutilek et al., 2002). Burnout refers to prolonged response to chronic emotional and interpersonal stressors on the job, and is defined in three dimensions of exhaustion, cynicism and inefficacy (Maslach et al., 2001). Physical and emotional exhaustions could precipitate cynicism, which in turn have the potential to reduce efficiency at work. These interrelated dimensions affect productivity and overall well-being of employees.

Freudenberger (1980) identified burnout as a state of fatigue or frustration brought about by devotion to a cause, way of life, or relationship that failed to produce the expected reward. Pines et al. (1981) state that burn-out is characterized by physical depletion, by feelings of helplessness and hopelessness, by emotional drain, and by the development of negative self-concept and negative attitudes toward work, life and other people.

Socio-psychological effects of unfavourable working situations portend grave consequences for employee well-being and productivity. Oladele (2010) reported that burnout symptoms most experienced by extension agents in selected states of South Western Nigeria were depression, insomnia, headaches, weight loss or gain, inability to make decision, increased worry and low job performance. Ogunlade et al. (2008) indicated that major burnout symptoms among extension agents in Kwara

state Nigeria were feelings of frustration, boredom, inadequate remuneration, poor training and work overload as well as physical and emotional exhaustions. Nyssee et al. (2003) also found that high risk taking and weak organizational planning predispose employees to burnout. Another factor critical to burnout is conflicting roles that employees experienced at work. Job burn-out produces varying effects on employees. Whippen et al. (2004) also found that, apart from behavioral and physical changes, burnout among employees could have negative effects on the clientele of their respondents. The description in the work has several implications on extension delivery and consequently requires that extension officers do not experience job stress and burnout in order for effective job performance. The purpose of this study was to isolate the determinants of job burnout and identify coping in use among extension officers in North West Province South Africa.

METHODOLOGY

The study was carried out in North West province, South Africa. The study population included all extension officers (200) in the province. A simple random sampling technique was used to select 40 extension officers from which data were collected. A structured questionnaire was designed based related literature and objectives of the study and comprised 45 items categorized as physical, psychological and behavioral symptoms of job burnout. The other section of the questionnaire consisted of 31 items on coping strategies on job burnout. Validity of the instrument was ensured through a panel of experts in the Departments of Agricultural Economics and Extension and extension professional from the Department of Agriculture, South Africa. The questionnaire had a reliability coefficient of 0.92 using the split half technique. Data were analyzed with Statistical Package for Social Sciences (SPSS) using frequencies, percentages, mean and multiple regressions.

RESULTS

Table 1 shows the personal characteristics of extension officers in North West Province, South Africa. Table 2 shows the mean and standard deviation of 44 items on job burnout by extension officers which were rated on a

Table 2. Job burnout symptoms experienced by extension officers.

Burnout symptoms	Mean	SD
Physical symptoms		
Depression	1.65	0.94
Insomnia	1.52	0.84
Headaches	1.60	0.81
Sexual dysfunction	1.65	0.80
Weight loss or gain	1.45	0.81
Gastrointestinal	1.40	0.74
Shortness of breath	1.17	0.59
Easy-Fatigability	1.40	0.67
Pain (unexplained origin)	1.30	0.68
Weakness	1.35	0.80
Eating disorder	1.10	0.77
Psychological symptoms		
Boredom	1.52	0.96
Reduced self concept	1.52	0.78
Rigidity to change	1.62	0.77
Loss of concern	1.60	0.92
Cynicism/negativism	1.87	0.82
Low morale	1.67	0.85
Loss of patience	1.72	0.87
Feelings of disgust	1.57	0.93
Frustration	1.67	0.88
Inability to make decision	1.62	0.80
Increased worry	1.35	0.83
Feeling of omniscient	1.37	0.86
Loss of charisma	1.42	0.84
Taking unusually high risks	1.37	0.80
Suspicion and Paranoia	1.55	0.81
Daily mood variation	1.52	0.90
Anger	1.65	0.92
Anxiety	1.50	0.90
Guilt	1.52	0.75
Hopelessness	1.67	0.88
Worthlessness	1.52	0.84
Behavioural symptoms		
Forgetfulness	1.60	0.84
Low job performance	1.32	0.88
Increased absenteeism	1.42	0.87
Increased drug use	1.47	0.87
Increased marital and family conflict	1.52	0.75
High alcohol use	1.57	0.78
Accident proness	1.75	0.80
Workaholics	1.60	0.67
Irritability	1.37	0.62
Withdrawal	1.67	0.88
Hallucination	1.35	0.92
Agitation	1.85	0.92

2-point scale of Yes (2), and No (1).

Table 3 shows the mean and standard deviation of 31 items on coping strategies by extension officers which were rated on a 2-point scale of Use (2), and Non-use (1). The actual mean was 1.5 due to the rating scale and a mean of 1.5 and above use of such strategies, while a mean less than 1.5 denoted non-use of such strategy. The result of multiple regression analysis of relationships between extension officers' socio-economic characteristics and job burnout were presented in Table 4.

DISCUSSION

From Table 1, majority of the extension officers were male (52.5%) with the mean age of 42.5 years, married (72.5%) and 82.5% were Christians. Eighty-five percent of the extension officer had Diploma as their educational qualification and a mean of 14 years as working experience. There was a mean of 4.2 persons per household and 85% live in their job location, rural or peri-urban notwithstanding. In terms of job designation 43% were extension officer. Zwane (2009) reported similar findings that that extension officers in Limpopo province of South Africa were mainly males, between 40 to 49 years, and had Diploma as their educational qualification. Bembridge, (1991) also reported similar findings in terms of the personal characteristics of extension officers in South Africa Table 2 shows that extension officers experiences 29 out of the listed 44 job burnout symptoms. Prominent symptoms among extension officers were cynicism/negativism (1.87) agitation (1.85) accident proness (1.75) and loss of patience (1.72). Oladele (2010) reported similar findings among extension agents in South Western Nigeria. Igodan and Newcomb (1986) found similar results among extension agents in Ohio State, America. However, low incidence of symptoms such as shortness of breath (1.17), easy-fatigability (1.40), pain of unexplained origin (1.30), weakness (1.35) and eating disorder (1.10) were recorded.

The results in Table 3 revealed an overwhelming general usage of coping strategies among extension officers against job burnout. All the means for the coping strategies were above the cut-off point of 1.5. The most prominent coping strategies as indicated by extension officers were maintaining an active personal social life outside of work (2.50), maintaining healthy relationship with co-workers (2.47), development of structural and personal support system (2.45) and maintaining healthy relationship with superior officers (2.47). Oladele (2010) reported use of similar coping strategies among extension agents in south western Nigeria.

In Table 4, the independent variables were significantly related to job burnout with F value of 5.28, $p < 0.05$. Also, R value of 0.94 showed that there was a strong correlation between independent variables and job burnout. The result further predicted 89 percent of the variation in job burnout by extension officers. Significant determinants

Table 3. Coping strategies used on job burn out.

Coping strategies	Mean	SD
I develop a realistic picture of my self	2.42	0.71
I keep a positive attitude at all times	2.40	0.81
I set realistic goals for my self	2.35	0.92
I don't easily get worked up	2.45	0.67
I recognize the symptoms of stress and burnout	2.37	0.77
I take time to rest when necessary	2.35	0.86
I ask for help when it's needed	2.35	0.69
I maintain a healthy relationship with co-worker(s)	2.47	0.87
I develop a structural and personal support system	2.45	0.81
I maintain a healthy relationship with superior officer(s)	2.47	0.81
I retain hope	2.40	0.92
I am highly receptive to new ideas	2.27	0.90
I develop a detached concern for recipients of my efforts	2.42	0.71
When I am offered help I easily accept it	2.42	0.71
I maintain an active personal social life outside of work	2.50	0.71
I easily interpret the assignments given to me	2.42	0.93
I take time-outs when I need them	2.35	0.76
I am satisfied with my job	2.27	0.90
I am improving myself academically	2.27	0.98
I maintain a regimen of proper nutrition and physical exercise	2.07	0.88
I worry a lot about trivial issues	2.07	0.88
I develop a sense of organization involvement	2.30	0.85
I am very energetic	2.40	0.84
I am willing to accept counseling when I need it	2.22	0.86
I look out for materials relevant to my job	2.37	0.89
I develop self therapies (meditations, religious meetings and relaxation)	2.17	1.05
I am optimistic by nature	2.35	0.86
I accentuate the positive	2.22	0.99
I prioritize on how best to accomplish tasks through time management	2.10	0.95
I am always on the look out for better opportunities	2.22	0.94
I am into other ventures to supplement my pay	2.10	0.92

ere gender ($t = 2.46$), educational level ($t = -3.02$), studying for higher degree ($t = -2.30$) and number of farmers covered ($t = -2.20$). It implies that as there are more the kind of job burnout experience by male extension officers would be different from that of female extension officers.

The higher the educational level of the respondents the lower the job burnout experienced. Similarly, the higher the opportunity to study for higher degree and the number of farmers covered by the extension officer the lower the incidence of job burnout. Ogunlade et al. (2008) reported that age, education, family size and monthly salary were significantly related to number of burnout symptoms among extension agents in Kwara state Nigeria. According to Oladele (2010) significant determinants of job burnout among extension agents in selected states of South Western Nigeria were age, number of children and coping strategy.

Conclusion

The study showed that the main symptoms of job burnout among extension officers in North West Province, South Africa were feelings of disgust, insomnia, headaches, weight loss or gain feeling of omniscient, pain of unexplained origin, hopelessness, agitation and workaholics. Also, the coping strategies among extension officers were development of self realistic picture, retaining hope, asking for help when it is needed, development of structural and personal support system, not getting easily get worked up, willingness to accept counseling when needed, and development of a sense of organization involvement. Significant determinants of job burnout were gender, educational level, studying for higher degree and number of farmers covered. This highlighted will help extension managers understand and manage their workforce in terms of job burnout and use of appropriate

Table 4. Determinants of job burnout among extension officers.

	B	Std. error	Beta	t	p
Constant	106.26	81.94		1.29	0.02
Gender	32.20	13.06	0.55	2.46	0.026
Age	0.15	1.14	0.02	0.13	0.89
Marital status	3.93	3.54	0.20	1.11	0.28
No of children	7.88	5.26	0.53	1.49	0.15
Educational level	-11.33	3.74	-0.50	-3.02	0.008
Religion	10.55	8.92	0.20	1.18	0.25
Studying for higher degree	-33.07	14.35	-0.49	-2.30	0.03
Level of study	8.20	14.97	0.12	0.54	0.59
Household size	7.2E-02	1.91	0.008	0.03	0.97
Working experience	-0.60	1.12	-0.15	-0.54	0.59
Living in job area	12.56	11.14	0.21	1.12	0.27
Rural-urban background	4.58	7.35	0.09	0.62	0.54
Place of residence	-5.06	4.56	-0.20	-1.11	0.28
Job designation	1.85	2.59	0.12	0.71	0.48
No of farmers groups covered	-2.79	1.26	-0.40	-2.20	0.04
No of farmers covered	-1.11	0.67	-0.31	-1.65	0.11
Means of mobility	-1.85E-02	0.01	-0.24	-1.17	0.25
Distance to farmers	-14.83	10.57	-0.27	-1.40	0.18
No of farmers groups covered	-4.63E-02	0.03	-0.37	-1.49	0.15
Coping strategy	-0.65	0.39	-0.33	-1.66	0.11
Information sources	-.249	0.43	-0.11	-0.57	0.57
R	0.94				
R Square	0.89				
Adjusted R	0.72				
F	5.28				
p	0.001				

coping strategies.

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