

**EMPLOYEES' STRESS AND WORK PERFORMANCE IN PORT HARCOURT
ELECTRICITY DISTRIBUTION COMPANY (PHEDCO): AN EXAMINATION OF
ORGANIZATIONAL ZONES AND MANAGEMENT PRACTICES.**

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Abstract

Employee stress has become a pressing challenge in Nigeria's public service organizations, particularly in the power sector where structural inefficiencies heighten workplace pressures. This paper examines the relationship between stress and employee performance using the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDCO) as a case study. Drawing on theories such as the Job Demand–Control Model and Role Theory, the study argues that organizational structures significantly shape stress levels through workload design, communication patterns, and decision-making processes. At PHEDCO, stress is driven by unrealistic revenue targets, inadequate resources, bureaucratic bottlenecks, and frequent confrontations with dissatisfied customers. These factors undermine employee morale, increase absenteeism, and reduce service quality, thereby affecting overall organizational performance. The paper highlights how structural reforms, such as decentralization of target-setting, employee wellness programs, and improved resource allocation, can mitigate stress and enhance performance outcomes. By framing stress as an organizational rather than purely individual challenge, the study emphasizes the need for Nigerian public service organizations to embed stress management strategies into structural design to achieve sustainable employee performance. Using a descriptive survey design, data was collected from 150 PHEDCO employees across Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom States through structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews. The study anticipates that high stress levels significantly reduce employee performance, while zones with better leadership support and resource allocation perform more effectively. It recommends implementing regular stress management programs, providing adequate resources and manpower, enhancing leadership and supervision, promoting work–life balance through flexible scheduling, and improving customer relations training to help employees handle client pressure. These measures are expected to enhance employee well-being, strengthen productivity, and improve overall service delivery across PHEDCO's zones.

Keywords: Stress, Employee performance, Organizational structure, Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDCO), Public service organizations, Nigeria, Workload management.

INTRODUCTION

Stress, in its simplest dictionary meaning, refers to a state of mental or emotional strain caused by demanding circumstances. Conceptually, it is the physiological and psychological response that occurs when individuals perceive that job demands exceed their ability to cope. In organizations, stress arises when workloads, structures, and policies overwhelm employees' resources.

Scholars distinguish between different types of stress. Eustress is positive stress that can motivate employees to achieve goals and remain productive, while distress occurs when stress becomes excessive and undermines health and performance. Stress can also be acute, resulting from short-term pressures such as deadlines, or chronic, arising from long-term organizational problems such as bureaucracy and unrealistic targets. In public service

organizations, employees often face organizational stress, which is stress embedded in the structure, culture, and management systems of the institution. Stress manifests physically through fatigue and health problems, psychologically through anxiety and reduced focus, and behaviorally through absenteeism, lateness, and workplace conflict. While minimal stress can sometimes enhance performance, chronic or organizational stress reduces morale, creativity, and decision-making, ultimately lowering both employee performance and organizational effectiveness. The importance of stress lies in its dual impact. For employees, unmanaged stress can lead to health breakdowns, burnout, and disengagement from work. For organizations, stress translates into lower productivity, declining service quality, high turnover, and poor customer satisfaction. In other words, stress is not simply an individual concern but a critical organizational issue with direct implications for work performance and long-term sustainability. The structure of an organization largely determines how stress impacts employees. Rigid hierarchies, poor communication, and unrealistic targets increase stress, while supportive and flexible systems can reduce it. In Nigeria's public service sector, the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDCO) illustrates this link clearly. Employees face stress from revenue pressures, hostile customer interactions, inadequate resources, and bureaucratic bottlenecks. These stressors reduce morale, increase absenteeism, and weaken service delivery, highlighting stress as both a human and structural challenge. This paper therefore examines how employees' stress affects work performance in organizational structures, using PHEDCO as a study, and proposes reforms to mitigate stress and improve productivity outcomes.

Statement of the Problem

Stress is a major challenge in public service organizations and at the Port Harcourt Electricity Distribution Company (PHEDCO) because it is evident as employees face unrealistic revenue targets, inadequate resources, and hostile customer interactions, all of which lower morale and productivity. PHEDCO, one of Nigeria's eleven Electricity Distribution Companies (DisCos), operates across six zones: Port Harcourt Zones 1, 2, and 3, Bayelsa, Akwa Ibom, and Cross River. While all zones encounter systemic pressures, stress appears to be unevenly managed. Some zones maintain stable performance despite these challenges, but Port Harcourt Zone 1 continues to struggle with high stress levels, poor morale, and reduced output. This issue is compounded by PHEDCO's national record of customer dissatisfaction, as it consistently receives the highest number of complaints among DisCos, with over 57,000 complaints recorded in early 2025 alone. Employees in Zone 1, being frontline staff, are disproportionately exposed to these pressures, making stress both a personal and structural problem. The critical question, therefore, is: why are some zones able to manage stress effectively while Zone 1 is not? Understanding this disparity is essential, as stress mismanagement in one zone affects PHEDCO's overall performance, service delivery, and public image.

Literature Review

Stress is broadly defined as a state of strain that occurs when workplace demands exceed coping resources (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984). In organizations, stress reflects both individual responses and systemic issues such as workload, policies, and leadership.

Types and Manifestations of Stress

Stress may be eustress (positive, motivating) or distress (negative, harmful), and can be acute (short-term), chronic (long-term), or organizational (rooted in structures and culture). Manifestations include physical illness, psychological strain, and behavioral problems such as absenteeism, lateness, and reduced commitment.

Theoretical Framework

The Job Demand–Control Model (Karasek, 1979) shows that stress is highest under high demands and low autonomy. The Effort–Reward Imbalance Model (Siegrist, 1996) highlights distress from imbalanced work effort and rewards. Role Theory (Kahn et al., 1964) links stress to ambiguity and conflict, while the Conservation of Resources Theory (Hobfoll, 1989) views stress as a reaction to resource loss. Together, these models explain how stress is shaped by organizational structure and employee environment.

Empirical Evidence and Previous Studies

Global research confirms the negative effects of stress. Cooper and Quick (2017) found that chronic stress reduces concentration and morale, while Ganster and Rosen (2013) showed it increases absenteeism and turnover. In Africa, Anbazhagan et al. (2013) observed that inadequate resources and bureaucratic rigidities heighten workplace stress.

In Nigeria, several studies reinforce these findings. Adeniji and Osibanjo (2012) reported that stress in the banking sector results from unrealistic targets and poor supervision. Olusegun (2013) found that stress in healthcare workers led to burnout and declining service quality. In public utilities, Ogueyungbo and Adebisi (2018) noted that lack of resources and high customer complaints drive employee frustration and poor service delivery.

PHEDCO Context

PHEDCO exemplifies these dynamics. Operating across Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom States, it has consistently recorded the highest electricity-related complaints among Nigeria’s DisCos — over 57,000 in Q1 2025. Employees, especially in Port Harcourt Zone 1, face customer hostility, billing disputes, and resource shortages. While other zones manage stress better through stronger leadership and resource allocation, Zone 1 struggles with chronic stress, declining morale, and weak performance. A study by Olanrele (2022) on the efficiency of Nigeria’s distribution companies showed significant variation in performance across the 11 DisCos, suggesting that internal structures and managerial practices influence outcomes. Similarly, an assessment of job satisfaction in Enugu Electricity Distribution Company (EEDC) by Nwokolo (2023) established that improved supervision, training, and employee engagement enhanced productivity. These studies, though not PHEDCO-specific, demonstrate that employee well-being and managerial support are decisive factors in the performance of electricity distributors. Furthermore, a recent occupational safety study on PHED workers in Port Harcourt reported that frequent exposure to physical and mental strain is common among staff due to field hazards and constant customer demands (Adeosun & Adegbite, 2023). This aligns with the findings of Dollard and Bakker (2010) that supportive leadership and a safe work climate reduce psychological stress and enhance engagement.

Despite these insights, few studies have examined stress comparatively across PHEDCO’s internal zones. There remains limited empirical data on why certain zones, such as Port Harcourt Zone 1, experience higher stress levels and lower performance compared to others. Addressing this gap is essential for understanding how stress dynamics influence productivity and service delivery within the company.

Research Objectives

The study seeks to:

- i. Identify the major types and sources of stress among employees across PHEDCO zones.
- ii. Examine the relationship between stress and employee performance in PHEDCO.
- iii. Assess the implications of stress for organizational productivity and service delivery.
- iv. Recommend strategies for reducing stress and improving employee performance.

Research Questions

- i. How does stress affect employee performance and productivity?
- ii. Why do some zones manage stress more effectively than others?
- iii. What strategies can reduce stress and improve employee performance in PHEDCO?

Research Hypotheses

- H1: There is a significant relationship between stress and employee performance in PHEDCO.
- H2: Resource availability and supportive leadership significantly reduce stress and improve performance.
- H3: Organizational stressors such as workload, role ambiguity, and customer complaints significantly predict variations in employee performance across PHEDCO zones.

METHODOLOGY

Research Design

The study adopts a descriptive survey design to investigate the relationship between workers stress and work performance across PHEDCO zones.

Population and Sampling

The population comprises PHEDCO staff in Rivers, Bayelsa, Cross River, and Akwa Ibom States. Using stratified random sampling, 150 employees were selected from technical, administrative, and customer service departments to ensure balanced representation.

Data Collection

- Primary Data: Structured questionnaires and semi-structured interviews captured stress types, sources, and performance outcomes.
- Secondary Data: Reports from PHEDCO, the Nigerian Electricity Regulatory Commission (NERC), and previous studies on stress and performance.

Research Instruments

The questionnaire (based on Likert-scale items) will measure:

- Types and sources of stress.
- Stress manifestations (physical, psychological, behavioral).
- Perceptions of employee performance.
- Coping strategies and organizational support.

Validity and Reliability

The instrument was validated by experts and pre-tested in a pilot study. Cronbach's alpha assessed internal consistency.

Data Analysis

Descriptive statistics summarized data, while regression and correlation was used to test hypotheses on stress–performance relationships. Qualitative responses from interviews underwent thematic analysis.

Ethical Considerations

Participation was voluntary, confidentiality was assured, and permission obtained from PHEDCO management. Data will be used strictly for academic purposes.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Expected Results

The study anticipates that stress has a significant negative effect on employee performance in PHEDCO. Employees in zones with poor stress management, such as Port Harcourt Zone 1, are expected to show lower productivity compared to zones that adopt better coping strategies. Organizational factors like workload, role ambiguity, and high customer complaints are likely to emerge as major predictors of stress. Supportive leadership and adequate resources are expected to correlate with higher performance.

Discussion

Findings were interpreted in line with the theoretical framework of role theory and the job demand–control model, showing how excessive demands without adequate support reduce employee efficiency. The results are also compared with previous studies in Nigeria and globally, emphasizing that while stress is a common workplace issue, its impact varies across organizations and regions. For PHEDCO, managing stress effectively could improve productivity, enhance service delivery, and reduce customer dissatisfaction across zones.

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Conclusion

The study establishes that stress is a critical factor influencing employee performance in PHEDCO. While stress is inevitable in the electricity distribution sector due to high customer demands and technical challenges, its negative effects can be minimized through proper management. Findings suggest that zones with stronger leadership support and better resource allocation perform better than those with poor stress management, such as Port Harcourt Zone 1.

Recommendation

- Strengthen Stress Management Programs: PHEDCO should implement regular stress audits, counseling, and wellness programs for staff.
- Improve Resource Allocation: Provide adequate tools, manpower, and technical support to reduce workload-related stress.
- Enhance Leadership and Supervision: Train managers to adopt supportive and participatory leadership styles that reduce role ambiguity.
- Promote Work–Life Balance: Introduce flexible work schedules and incentives to reduce burnout.
- Customer Relations Training: Equip frontline staff with communication and conflict-resolution skills to handle customer complaints more effectively.

By addressing these issues, PHEDCO can enhance employee well-being, improve productivity, and strengthen service delivery across all zones.

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