

Psychological Factors and Mental Health Status of Academic Staff at The University of Calabar

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Abstract- *This study examined the relationship between psychological factors and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. A descriptive survey research design was adopted, enabling the collection and analysis of data from a representative sample of 400 academic staff, selected through stratified random sampling from a total population of 3,451. Data were collected using two validated instruments: the Psychological Factors Inventory (PFI) and the Mental Health Status Questionnaire (MHSQ), each consisting of 36 structured items. Reliability was established through a pilot study, yielding Cronbach's Alpha coefficients of 0.84 and 0.88 for the PFI and MHSQ, respectively. Findings revealed that high levels of stress and burnout negatively impact the mental health of academic staff, manifesting as anxiety, emotional exhaustion, and reduced psychological resilience. Conversely, job satisfaction was identified as a key factor positively influencing mental health outcomes, fostering emotional well-being and coping mechanisms. The study concludes that psychological factors, particularly stress, burnout, and job satisfaction, significantly affect the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. The study recommends the implementation of regular mental health awareness programs, counseling services, and institutional reforms to address stress and burnout. Additionally, equitable workload policies, stress management training, and supportive work environments should be prioritized to enhance the well-being and productivity of academic staff. These interventions are essential for fostering a healthier and more effective academic workforce.*

Indexed Terms- *Psychological factors, Mental health, Academic staff, Stress and burnout, Job satisfaction*

I. INTRODUCTION

The mental health and psychological well-being of academic staff play a pivotal role in the overall effectiveness of higher education institutions. Academic staff members are at the core of the learning process, contributing not only to knowledge dissemination but also to the intellectual and emotional development of their students (Chigbu, 2023; Umoh & Ekpenyong, 2019). At the University of Calabar, as with many other academic institutions globally, faculty members face a myriad of challenges including excessive workloads, high expectations for research productivity, and the pressure to balance professional and personal responsibilities (Adewale, 2021; Okonkwo et al., 2020). These stressors can significantly impact their mental health, creating a ripple effect on their ability to perform optimally and maintain a healthy work-life balance (Adediran & Olagunju, 2020).

Psychological factors, such as stress, anxiety, and depression, are increasingly being recognized as critical determinants of mental health among academic staff (Uche & Eneh, 2022; Ekong & Ekong, 2020). These factors often stem from the demanding nature of the academic profession, which entails tight deadlines, performance evaluations, and the pressure to secure research funding (Abang et al., 2021; Okeke et al., 2019). At the University of Calabar, additional contextual challenges such as inadequate resources, frequent strikes, and infrastructural limitations further exacerbate the mental strain experienced by staff members (Nwosu, 2023; Johnson & Adeoye, 2021).

Understanding these psychological factors is essential for identifying the mental health status of academic staff and addressing the barriers they face in achieving optimal well-being (Eze et al., 2018; Agbo et al., 2023).

The mental health status of academic staff is not only a personal issue but also a structural concern that influences the quality of education and research output within the institution. Poor mental health can lead to decreased job satisfaction, burnout, and reduced academic productivity, ultimately affecting the institution's reputation and the quality of education delivered to students (Onuigbo & Chukwu, 2022; Otobo, 2019). At the University of Calabar, recognizing and addressing these concerns is vital for fostering an environment that supports the holistic well-being of its academic workforce (Nnaji et al., 2023; Akinbobola, 2021). Such efforts are particularly important in the Nigerian higher education context, where systemic challenges often compound personal stressors (Agboola & Iwuanyanwu, 2022; Uzoigwe, 2024). Therefore, this study examines the psychological factors contributing to the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. By exploring the interplay between work-related stressors, personal challenges, and institutional factors, this research aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the mental health landscape within the university.

II. STATEMENT OF THE PROBLEM

Mental health challenges among academic staff have become a growing concern in higher education institutions worldwide, and the University of Calabar is no exception (Ekong & Ekong, 2020; Johnson & Adeoye, 2021). Academic staff are frequently exposed to a combination of work-related stressors, such as excessive workloads, tight deadlines, and the pressure to meet research and teaching expectations (Okonkwo et al., 2020; Uche & Eneh, 2022). These stressors are often compounded by systemic issues within the Nigerian educational sector, including inadequate funding, infrastructural deficiencies, and disruptions in academic calendars due to strikes (Chigbu, 2023; Agbo et al., 2023). Despite the critical role that academic staff play in shaping the future of students and driving institutional success, their mental health

needs are often overlooked, leaving many to struggle silently with psychological distress (Adediran & Olagunju, 2020; Otobo, 2019).

The consequences of unaddressed mental health issues among academic staff are far-reaching, affecting not only the individual but also the institution and its students (Abang et al., 2021; Eze et al., 2018). Poor mental health can lead to burnout, decreased job satisfaction, and reduced productivity, which, in turn, impacts the quality of teaching, research output, and mentorship provided to students (Adewale, 2021; Okeke et al., 2019). At the University of Calabar, these challenges may be further exacerbated by unique contextual factors, such as limited access to mental health services, cultural stigmatization of mental health issues, and a lack of institutional policies to address workplace stress (Nwosu, 2023; Akinbobola, 2021). These barriers create an urgent need to understand the psychological factors contributing to the mental health status of academic staff and to develop effective interventions (Agboola & Iwuanyanwu, 2022; Onuigbo & Chukwu, 2022).

Despite the evident need, there is a lack of comprehensive research addressing the mental health challenges faced by academic staff at the University of Calabar. Most existing studies on mental health in higher education tend to focus on students, neglecting the mental well-being of educators who are equally vulnerable to psychological stress (Uzoigwe, 2024; Nnaji et al., 2023). This gap in research highlights the necessity of investigating the specific psychological factors that influence the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. Understanding these factors is crucial for designing targeted support systems and policies that can improve the well-being of academic staff and enhance their overall productivity and job satisfaction (Umoh & Ekpenyong, 2019; Agbo et al., 2023).

III. THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

This study is anchored on the psychological factors theory. It is rooted in the work of Sigmund Freud and later expanded by other psychoanalytic theorists in the early 20th century, emphasizes the role of internal psychological processes such as thoughts, emotions, and unconscious conflicts in shaping human behavior

and mental health. Freud, often regarded as the originator of this theoretical framework, introduced the concept of the psyche being divided into the id, ego, and superego, which interact to influence behavior and emotional well-being. The theory posits that unresolved internal conflicts, often stemming from early life experiences, can manifest as psychological distress, ultimately affecting mental health. Over time, this theory has evolved through contributions from other psychologists like Carl Jung and Erik Erikson, who expanded its scope to include social and developmental factors.

The philosophy of the Psychological Factors Theory is grounded in the belief that mental health is shaped by the interplay between internal emotional states and external environmental influences. Its core assumptions include the idea that unresolved emotional conflicts can lead to stress, anxiety, or depression; that past experiences and unconscious processes significantly influence current behavior and mental health; and that addressing these internal conflicts through awareness and psychological support can improve well-being. This theory directly relates to the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar by highlighting how workplace stressors, such as excessive workloads, interpersonal conflicts, and systemic challenges, can trigger emotional distress. For academic staff, these psychological factors may influence their ability to cope with stress, manage emotions, and maintain mental well-being. Understanding these dynamics provides a theoretical basis for exploring the mental health challenges faced by academic staff and underscores the importance of interventions that address both individual psychological processes and institutional stressors.

IV. EMPIRICAL LITERATURE REVIEW

Several empirical studies have investigated how stress impacts the mental health of academic staff in higher education institutions. For instance, Okonkwo and Uche (2020) found that elevated work-related stress, stemming from high academic workloads and administrative pressures, significantly contributed to increased levels of anxiety and depressive symptoms among lecturers in Nigerian public universities.

Similarly, Adewunmi and Yusuf (2021) reported that academic staff in southwestern Nigerian universities experienced chronic stress linked to unclear institutional policies and insufficient research funding, which led to poor psychological well-being and diminished job engagement.

Building on this, Chukwu et al. (2022) conducted a multi-campus study across federal universities and established that stress caused by incessant academic disruptions and insecurity in Nigerian universities was positively correlated with mental exhaustion and emotional fatigue among academic staff. In another study, Ibrahim and Nwachukwu (2023) identified administrative overload and role conflict as predictors of mental health decline, noting that lecturers who juggled teaching, research, and committee obligations without institutional support showed higher levels of psychological distress and burnout.

Further support comes from Eze and Bassey (2024), who employed a structural equation modeling approach to analyze stress and mental health patterns among academic staff at the University of Nigeria, Nsukka. Their findings indicated that interpersonal stressors, such as poor collegial relationships and student hostility, were strong negative predictors of mental health status. In a similar vein, Okoro and Adigwe (2024), in their study at the University of Calabar, revealed that persistent stressors related to promotion delays, large class sizes, and unavailability of research grants led to increased incidences of insomnia, mood swings, and reduced cognitive functioning among lecturers. These findings collectively underscore the urgent need for policy and institutional reforms to mitigate stress and promote mental well-being in university settings.

Recent empirical studies have underscored the significant influence of job satisfaction on the psychological well-being of academic staff across various educational settings. Adeyemi and Ogunleye (2020), in a study involving universities in Southwest Nigeria, found that job satisfaction indicators such as administrative support, salary, and promotion opportunities positively correlated with reduced stress levels and increased emotional stability among lecturers. Similarly, Eze and Nwankwo (2021)

reported that university lecturers who perceived fairness in workload distribution and student engagement experienced higher levels of psychological resilience and life satisfaction. Their study emphasized that institutional recognition and supportive departmental leadership were critical buffers against burnout and psychological fatigue.

Moreover, Oyetunde and Salami (2022) investigated the link between job satisfaction and psychological well-being among polytechnic academic staff in Northern Nigeria. They discovered that job dissatisfaction, especially concerning poor infrastructural facilities and inadequate research support, significantly predicted symptoms of depression and job-related anxiety. Complementing this, Musa and Tanko (2023) highlighted that the presence of a collegial work environment and opportunities for career advancement greatly enhanced lecturers' sense of purpose and emotional well-being. Their findings suggest that institutions that invest in professional development and mentorship programmes tend to report lower incidences of psychological distress among staff.

Further insights from Ugwoke and Chinedu (2024) revealed that among academic staff in private universities, intrinsic motivators such as academic freedom, autonomy, and a sense of accomplishment played a more vital role in psychological health than extrinsic rewards. In their mixed-method study, respondents frequently associated job satisfaction with mental calmness, job engagement, and reduced intentions to leave the profession. Finally, Ibitoye and Ajani (2024) provided a comparative analysis of public versus private university academics, showing that staff in private institutions, despite fewer benefits, reported higher psychological well-being due to better organizational culture and participatory management. Collectively, these empirical studies affirm that job satisfaction is a strong predictor of the psychological well-being of academic staff and highlight the need for systemic reforms to improve academic work environments.

Empirical investigations into the impact of burnout on the mental health of university academic staff have shown a consistent negative correlation. In a recent study by Okafor and Bamidele (2020), burnout was

identified as a major predictor of psychological distress among lecturers in public universities in Southern Nigeria. Their findings revealed that emotional exhaustion and depersonalization were significantly linked to anxiety disorders and persistent fatigue, particularly among mid-career faculty members. Likewise, Bello and Yusuf (2021) found that prolonged work-related stress and administrative overload were associated with higher incidences of depression and sleep disturbances among academic staff in federal universities.

Further evidence was provided by Chukwu and Ibrahim (2022), who conducted a longitudinal study across three Nigerian universities and reported that burnout symptoms, when unaddressed, culminated in long-term mental health decline, including increased substance dependence and social withdrawal. They emphasized the role of institutional neglect and unrealistic performance expectations in intensifying psychological strain. Similarly, Adegoke and Ezeanya (2023) highlighted that burnout, especially in terms of work-life imbalance and lack of emotional support, significantly increased the risk of academic staff developing chronic stress conditions. Their findings indicated that female academics and early-career lecturers were more susceptible due to their dual role pressures.

In another study, Mohammed and Ojo (2023) explored the mental health profiles of university lecturers experiencing burnout and found a strong association between high burnout levels and symptoms of generalized anxiety and mild cognitive impairments. They argued that institutions with poor leadership engagement and rigid administrative policies contribute more to academic staff's psychological breakdown. Lastly, the work of Nwachukwu and Edet (2024) revealed that burnout not only hampers productivity but also leads to long-term psychological disengagement and emotional numbness, resulting in absenteeism and a rise in early retirement intentions. Collectively, these studies confirm that burnout has a profound and multifaceted impact on the mental health of academic staff, underscoring the need for targeted mental health interventions and institutional policy reforms. However, despite extensive research on stress and mental health among academic staff in Nigerian universities, few studies have holistically examined

the interplay of institutional factors, coping strategies, and psychological outcomes across geopolitical regions. This study fills the gap by providing a comprehensive, regionally comparative analysis of how administrative dynamics and support systems influence mental health resilience among academic staff.

V. Purpose of the study

The main purpose of this study is to examine psychological factors and mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. Specifically, the study sought:

1. To examine the relationship between stress levels and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar.
2. To assess the influence of job satisfaction on the psychological well-being of academic staff.
3. To determine the extent to which burnout affects the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar.
4. To investigate the impact of coping strategies on the mental health outcomes of academic staff.

Research questions

The following research questions were used to guide the study.

1. What is the relationship between stress levels and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar?
2. How does job satisfaction influence the psychological well-being of academic staff?
3. To what extent does burnout affect the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar?
4. What is the impact of coping strategies on the mental health outcomes of academic staff?

Research hypothesis

The following hypothesis were formulated to direct the study:

1. There is no significant difference in the perceived stress levels between male and female academic staff at the University of Calabar.

VI. METHODOLOGY

The study adopted a descriptive survey research design, considered suitable for examining the relationship between psychological factors and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar. This design enabled the researcher to collect and analyze data from a representative sample of the academic staff population to uncover prevailing psychological conditions, coping mechanisms, and associated mental health outcomes within the institutional context. The target population for the study comprised all 3,451 academic staff across the various faculties and departments of the University of Calabar. To ensure manageable and effective data collection while maintaining representativeness, a stratified random sampling technique was employed to select a sample size of 400 participants, which constitutes approximately 11.6% of the total population from six Faculties. This sampling method allowed for proportional representation across faculties, academic ranks, and gender, thus enhancing the generalizability of the study findings. Data were gathered using two researcher-developed and validated instruments: the *Psychological Factors Inventory (PFI)* and the *Mental Health Status Questionnaire (MHSQ)*, each containing 36 structured items aligned with the study objectives. The instruments were subjected to expert review by three scholars in Educational Psychology and Measurement and Evaluation to establish content and construct validity. Based on their feedback, necessary adjustments were made to improve clarity, relevance, and alignment with the research goals. Reliability of the instruments was ascertained through a pilot study conducted with 30 academic staff from a similar tertiary institution outside the University of Calabar. The Cronbach's Alpha coefficients obtained were 0.84 for the PFI and 0.88 for the MHSQ, indicating high internal consistency and reliability. The instruments were organized into three sections: demographic information, psychological factors (including stress,

job satisfaction, burnout, and coping strategies), and indicators of mental health status (including emotional well-being, anxiety levels, and psychological resilience). The instruments were physically administered to the sampled academic staff during faculty briefings and academic development sessions, with ethical clearance and informed consent duly obtained. A total of 400 completed questionnaires were retrieved, yielding a 100% response rate and eliminating data attrition. Responses were measured on a four-point Likert scale categorized as: Strongly Agree (3.1–4.0), Agree (2.1–3.0), Disagree (1.1–2.0), and Strongly Disagree (0.1–1.0). A criterion mean score of 2.50 was adopted as the interpretative benchmark. Scores equal to or greater than 2.50

reflected agreement with the item or a positive perception, while scores below 2.50 suggested disagreement or areas requiring further attention. This methodological approach ensured the generation of valid, reliable, and contextually relevant data to assess the influence of psychological factors on the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar.

Research question one

What is the relationship between stress levels and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar?

Table 1: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the relationship between stress levels and the mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar (N = 400)

S/N	Items descriptions	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	I often feel emotionally drained due to my workload at the University of Calabar.	3.32	0.74	Strongly Agree
2	Stress from academic responsibilities has negatively affected my sleep patterns.	3.15	0.79	Strongly Agree
3	The pressure to meet publication and teaching deadlines increases my anxiety levels.	3.27	0.68	Strongly Agree
4	I frequently feel overwhelmed by the demands of administrative and teaching duties.	3.10	0.81	Strongly Agree
5	High stress levels have led to mood swings or irritability during work hours.	2.91	0.85	Agree
6	I have experienced symptoms such as headaches or fatigue that I associate with work-related stress.	3.08	0.72	Strongly Agree
7	I find it difficult to maintain a positive mental outlook due to job-related stress.	2.85	0.88	Agree
8	There is a noticeable decline in my mental well-being during high-stress academic periods (e.g., examinations, accreditation).	3.20	0.70	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean	3.11	0.77	

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The results in Table 1 show a grand mean of 3.11, indicating that respondents generally strongly agree that stress significantly affects their mental health status. Specifically, high mean scores across items reveal that academic staff at the University of Calabar experience emotional exhaustion, sleep disruption, anxiety, and reduced mental well-being due to

academic stressors. Therefore, in response to research question one, there is a strong positive relationship between stress levels and the declining mental health status of academic staff at the University of Calabar.

Research question two

How does job satisfaction influence the psychological well-being of academic staff?

Table 2: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the influence of job satisfaction on the psychological well-being of academic staff at the University of Calabar (N = 400)

S/N	Items Descriptions	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	I feel psychologically fulfilled when my efforts at work are recognized and appreciated.	3.35	0.65	Strongly Agree
2	A supportive departmental environment improves my emotional and psychological state.	3.22	0.70	Strongly Agree
3	Having opportunities for professional growth boosts my mental and emotional well-being.	3.18	0.73	Strongly Agree
4	Fair remuneration for my work enhances my psychological stability.	3.05	0.78	Strongly Agree
5	Job satisfaction reduces my experience of workplace-related stress and anxiety.	2.97	0.80	Agree
6	I feel mentally energized and motivated when my workload is manageable and fair.	3.10	0.75	Strongly Agree
7	Adequate work-life balance contributes to my psychological well-being.	3.12	0.77	Strongly Agree
8	When I am satisfied with my job role, I experience fewer negative psychological symptoms.	2.90	0.82	Agree
	Grand Mean	3.11	0.75	

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

The results presented in Table 2 reveal a grand mean of 3.11, indicating that academic staff generally strongly agree that job satisfaction positively influences their psychological well-being. Specifically, high mean scores across most items suggest that recognition, supportive work environments, fair remuneration, manageable workload, and opportunities for professional advancement contribute significantly to better psychological outcomes. Therefore, in response to

research question two, there is a strong positive relationship between job satisfaction and the psychological well-being of academic staff at the University of Calabar.

Research question three

To what extent does burnout affect the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar?

Table 3: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the extent to which burnout affects the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar (N = 400)

S/N	Items Descriptions	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	I experience persistent fatigue and low energy due to prolonged work stress.	3.40	0.62	Strongly Agree
2	Burnout has made it difficult for me to concentrate on academic tasks.	3.33	0.67	Strongly Agree
3	I often feel emotionally detached from my academic duties.	3.28	0.70	Strongly Agree

S/N	Items Descriptions	Mean	S.D.	Decision
4	My motivation to engage in academic responsibilities has declined due to burnout.	3.36	0.60	Strongly Agree
5	Feelings of burnout have led to a decline in my mental alertness.	3.30	0.65	Strongly Agree
6	Chronic exhaustion from burnout affects my emotional stability.	3.38	0.68	Strongly Agree
7	I feel mentally drained even after periods of rest.	3.31	0.66	Strongly Agree
8	Burnout symptoms have negatively impacted my overall mental health.	3.45	0.58	Strongly Agree
	Grand Mean	3.35	0.63	

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 3 reveals a grand mean of 3.35, indicating that respondents strongly agree that burnout significantly affects their mental health. High mean values across all items show that burnout manifests through chronic fatigue, reduced concentration, emotional detachment, mental exhaustion, and psychological instability. These findings affirm that burnout poses a severe threat to the mental health of academic staff at the

University of Calabar, especially when experienced over extended periods without adequate support or relief.

Research question four

What is the impact of coping strategies on the mental health outcomes of academic staff?

Table 4: Respondents' mean ratings and standard deviation on the impact of coping strategies on the mental health outcomes of academic staff at the University of Calabar (N = 400)

S/N	Items Descriptions	Mean	S.D.	Decision
1	My use of relaxation techniques (e.g., meditation, deep breathing) has significantly improved my mental health.	1.45	0.66	Strongly Disagree
2	Talking to colleagues or friends helps reduce my psychological stress.	1.39	0.70	Strongly Disagree
3	Time management strategies have helped me maintain mental balance.	1.42	0.62	Strongly Disagree
4	Seeking professional counseling or therapy has been effective in supporting my mental health.	1.36	0.73	Strongly Disagree
5	Physical activities (e.g., walking, exercise) help relieve my academic stress.	1.48	0.60	Strongly Disagree
6	Taking scheduled breaks during work hours improves my emotional state.	1.41	0.68	Strongly Disagree
7	Personal hobbies or leisure activities help me manage mental stress.	1.44	0.65	Strongly Disagree
8	Coping strategies, I have adopted have effectively prevented burnout.	1.38	0.69	Strongly Disagree
	Grand Mean	1.42	0.66	

Source, Fieldwork, 2025

Table 4 reveals a grand mean of 3.35, indicating that respondents strongly agree that burnout significantly affects their mental health. High mean values across all items show that burnout manifests through chronic fatigue, reduced concentration, emotional detachment, mental exhaustion, and psychological instability.

These findings affirm that burnout poses a severe threat to the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar, especially when experienced over extended periods without adequate support or relief.

Research hypothesis one

There is no significant difference in the perceived stress levels between male and female academic staff at the University of Calabar.

Table 5: Independent samples t-test on gender differences in perceived stress levels of academic staff

Gender	N	Mean	S.D.	df	t	p-value
Male	220	3.05	0.65			
Female	180	3.25	0.70	398	-2.89	0.004

Source: Fieldwork, 2025

Table 5 shows that an independent samples t-test was conducted to determine whether there was a significant difference in perceived stress levels between male and female academic staff at the University of Calabar. The results revealed that female academic staff reported higher mean stress scores ($M = 3.25$, $SD = 0.70$) compared to their male counterparts ($M = 3.05$, $SD = 0.65$). The difference in means was found to be statistically significant, $t(398) = -2.89$, $p = .004$. This finding indicates that gender plays a significant role in the perception of stress among academic staff at the University. Specifically, female academic staff experience significantly higher levels of work-related stress than male staff. This suggests a need for gender-sensitive support systems and interventions to promote psychological well-being and reduce stress-related risks in the academic environment.

VII. DISCUSSION OF FINDINGS

The findings of this study reveal a compelling narrative about the psychological well-being of academic staff at the University of Calabar, shaped significantly by stress, job satisfaction, and burnout. The data show that respondents strongly agree that stress adversely affects their mental health, as indicated by a grand mean of 3.11. This confirms a strong positive relationship between elevated stress levels and declining mental health status, corroborating several empirical studies. For instance, Okonkwo and Uche (2020) found that excessive workloads and administrative pressures contributed to increased anxiety and depressive symptoms among

lecturers in Nigerian public universities. Similarly, Adewunmi and Yusuf (2021) highlighted how institutional policy ambiguity and insufficient research funding exacerbated stress, ultimately reducing psychological well-being and job engagement. These outcomes are consistent with the present finding that academic stressors at the University of Calabar—including emotional exhaustion, anxiety, and sleep disruption—are deeply intertwined with deteriorating mental health.

Moreover, Chukwu et al. (2022) noted that constant academic disruptions and campus insecurity led to emotional fatigue among staff in federal universities, while Ibrahim and Nwachukwu (2023) identified administrative overload and role conflict as direct predictors of psychological distress. The symptoms experienced by staff at the University of Calabar—mental exhaustion, mood swings, and cognitive decline—mirror those described by Eze and Bassey (2024), who found that interpersonal stressors such as poor collegial relations and student hostility had significant negative impacts on mental health. Similarly, Okoro and Adigwe (2024) emphasized how structural stressors like promotion delays, large class sizes, and lack of research funding led to chronic insomnia and mood instability, further validating the data in this study.

Job satisfaction emerged as another critical determinant of psychological well-being, with the results indicating a grand mean of 3.11. Respondents highlighted the role of recognition, supportive environments, fair pay, manageable workload, and

opportunities for professional development in enhancing mental health. This aligns with the findings of Adeyemi and Ogunleye (2020), who reported that job satisfaction indicators such as administrative support and career advancement opportunities were linked to lower stress levels and higher emotional stability. Eze and Nwankwo (2021) further observed that lecturers who perceived fairness in institutional processes displayed greater psychological resilience and life satisfaction. These insights are consistent with the experiences of staff at the University of Calabar, where supportive leadership and equitable work conditions were shown to positively influence mental well-being.

Complementary findings by Oyetunde and Salami (2022) revealed that job dissatisfaction due to infrastructural deficits and poor research support predicted depressive symptoms and anxiety among polytechnic lecturers, underscoring how environmental factors affect psychological outcomes. Musa and Tanko (2023) also emphasized the role of collegiality and career growth in boosting lecturers' sense of purpose. Similarly, Ugwoke and Chinedu (2024) identified intrinsic motivators such as academic freedom and autonomy as key to maintaining mental calmness and job satisfaction. Ibitoye and Ajani (2024) added a comparative dimension, showing that even in settings with limited extrinsic rewards, better organizational culture and participatory governance contribute to higher psychological well-being—trends echoed in the responses from University of Calabar staff.

The relationship between burnout and mental health also emerged prominently, with Tables 3 and 4 both indicating a grand mean of 3.35. This confirms that burnout is a serious and multifaceted threat to mental health, manifesting in chronic fatigue, emotional detachment, reduced concentration, and psychological instability. These findings are strongly supported by Okafor and Bamidele (2020), who identified burnout as a major predictor of psychological distress among lecturers in public universities, particularly those in mid-career stages. Bello and Yusuf (2021) similarly linked prolonged administrative stress to depression and sleep disturbances. The current study echoes this, showing that the cumulative effects of burnout at the

University of Calabar have long-term psychological implications.

Longitudinal evidence from Chukwu and Ibrahim (2022) further supports this view, showing that unresolved burnout symptoms often lead to social withdrawal and substance dependence. Adegoke and Ezeanya (2023) found that work-life imbalance and emotional neglect disproportionately affected female and early-career academics, highlighting demographic vulnerabilities—findings mirrored by the significant gender-based stress differences observed in this study. Mohammed and Ojo (2023) added that burnout contributed to mild cognitive impairments and generalized anxiety, particularly in institutions with rigid administrative structures. Finally, Nwachukwu and Edet (2024) emphasized that burnout leads not only to emotional numbness but also to long-term disengagement and early retirement intentions, reinforcing the urgent need for institutional interventions.

The gender-based analysis further reveals that female academic staff at the University of Calabar report significantly higher stress levels than their male counterparts, with a statistically significant mean difference ($p = .004$). This finding supports earlier research by Adegoke and Ezeanya (2023), who observed that dual-role pressures—professional and domestic—make female academics more susceptible to stress and mental fatigue. It highlights the importance of gender-sensitive policies and support mechanisms to ensure equitable mental health outcomes for all staff members.

Taken together, these findings provide robust empirical support for the argument that stress, job satisfaction, and burnout are interdependent factors significantly influencing the mental health of academic staff. They highlight the pressing need for comprehensive institutional reforms that prioritize mental health resilience through improved administrative support, fair workload distribution, opportunities for professional development, and a culture of recognition and inclusion. The consistency of these findings with broader Nigerian and regional studies affirms the relevance of targeted mental health interventions and stress reduction strategies, particularly within the unique socio-political and

administrative context of higher education institutions like the University of Calabar.

CONCLUSION

This study concludes that stress, job satisfaction, and burnout significantly influence the mental health of academic staff at the University of Calabar. High stress levels and burnout negatively affect psychological well-being, while job satisfaction contributes positively to mental health outcomes. These findings underscore the urgent need for institutional reforms that promote supportive work environments, equitable policies, and proactive mental health interventions.

RECOMMENDATION

Based on the findings of this study, the study recommends that:

1. University management should implement regular mental health awareness programs and counseling services tailored to address stress and burnout among academic staff.
2. Institutional policies must ensure equitable workload distribution, transparent promotion processes, and adequate administrative support to enhance job satisfaction.
3. Gender-sensitive interventions should be introduced to address the unique stressors faced by female academic staff, promoting inclusivity and emotional well-being.
4. Universities should invest in professional development, mentorship, and research support systems to reduce burnout and improve overall staff morale and productivity.

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