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## EXPLORING THE IMPACT OF STRESS MANAGEMENT ON SERVICE DELIVERY IN RIVERS STATE'S FAST-FOOD INDUSTRY

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**Abstract:** In the fast-food industry, one of the most challenging issues that the managers have to face is related to the stress of work. This is one factor that casts its effect on the performance of employees no matter the level they work (Ross, 2005). This study examined the impact of stress management on the quality of services in fast-food companies in Rivers State. The study was a descriptive survey for a target population that comprised of five (5) branches of five (5) fast-food companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The simple random sampling design was employed in the organization and in order to ensure that the population was given equal chances of being selected for the study and the sources of data for the study were from both primary and secondary sources. Data was analyzed using frequencies, percentages, mean and correlation coefficient was used to test the hypothesis. The findings of this study revealed that there is a significant relationship between flextime work and service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Also, there is a significant relationship between flextime work and service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Further findings revealed that, there is a significant relationship between flextime work and service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Based on the findings from the research, it was concluded that Flexibility in work would benefit the organization through reliable, tangible and empathy in service delivery. Also, the workers can become more enthusiastic to balance the need of the work and their personal life. It was recommended that organizations and servicing companies should engage in flexible work arrangement for their staff since offering flexible working to employees can boost staff morale and improve their physical and mental wellbeing.

**Keywords:** Flextime Work, Service Reliability, Fast-food, Service Tangibility, and Service Empathy

### INTRODUCTION

A major feature that has strongly been associated with fast-food industry is the sudden and rapid rise of international players and fierce competition. As a result of this situation, most of the fast-food in this industry got in the trap of strategic bind: making an attempt to deescalate the costs with the help of different cost cutting techniques and at the same time trying to escalate the quality and level of services that they provide to the

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customers (Bernhardt, Dresser, & Hatton, 2003; Korczynski, 2002). All over the world the fast-food industry is considered as the most significant part of the luxury industry. In delivering the service product, employees of fast-food industry play their integral part. Customers can taste lasting positive experiences as a result of the excellent services that the employees of fast-food industry provide to them.

In the fast-food industry, one of the most challenging issues that the managers have to face is related to the stress of work. This is one factor that casts its effect on the performance of employees no matter at which level they work (Ross, 2005). Researches in recent times, point out that in the fast-food industry, employees' stress is an important concern. As a result of the job stress employees can become exhausted and cynical which in turn would affect the services that are provided to the customers (Kim, 2008). It is found through research that job stress in fast-food industry is moderately correlated with a number of physical illness and physiological symptoms such as headaches, strokes, fatigue, heart attacks, indigestion, blood pressure, and ulcers. Therefore, these affected conditions of employees impeded their way to exploit their full potential. In this way, not only the productivity and quality of the service gets affected but it also becomes the reason to increase the healthcare costs for employers.

Besides stress that could be caused by family or personal problems, stress at work has become even a greater problem because of job restructure, globalization and more demand on the task at hand. This might lead to higher job insecurity which would make employees feel stressed and distressed. Work stress can affect employees regardless of gender, position or type of employment. If one looks around and scans the research on stress and mainly stress at workplace, one discovers that stress is settled among the workers as an inevitable factor. Stress is linked on to one's ability to manage the recourses, environmental demands and some other unknown shortcoming to the process while doing an activity, but if it looks at stress as a general subject then it would be evaluated as an unpredictable phenomenon.

Stress has serious consequences for the performance of an organization. Some of the impacts that stress has on an organization are increased employee turnover, employee absence and reduced productivity. Stress Affects organizations in terms of cost as well, for example the number of persons absence due to sickness tends to be the most obvious and most easily calculated cost (Kovach, 2007). Therefore, highlighting that stress would lead an organization to incur more costs rather than profits.

In delivering quality and expected services to the customers one of the key factors is Flexible working arrangements. Flexible working arrangements have been identified as a critical factor of balancing work and personal commitments to reduce employees' stress. Employers are allowing flexible work arrangements to minimize work pressure, stress and burnout to reduce health related problems. Ridgley, Scott, Hunt and Harp (2005) assert that flexible work schedules have been accepted globally, providing potential benefits for employers and employees, and it is advantageous if well managed. In today's environment, people and organizations are focused to do more with less and they need to respond rapidly to external stress and ongoing changes (Odendaal & Roodt, 2002). Advocates opine that flexibility reduces stress and helps workers to balance their work and family lives (Corporate voices for Working families & WFD, 2005 cited in Grzywacz, Carlson & Shulkin, 2008). Hence, employees are more focused and conscious of their work; resulting in more organizational productivity and creativity. Flextime may, therefore, be a moderating factor for stress.

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With flextime employees are permitted to select their own working hours, provided that they work within specific limitations determined by their employers (Mondy & Noe, 2005). This changeable work plan is different from customary work agreements as time is highly valued. Also, flextime is a human resource department strategy and has been identified as a value adding strategic factor in human resource management. A flexible work schedule equips employers with a framework in which to recruit new employees and retain highly skilled and qualified employees (Mondy & Noe, 2005). A compressed working week allows employees to work more hours than usual per day and fewer days per week. A salient feature of flexible work hours is that it can reduce the morning tension ‘; worrying about childcare, symptoms of stress (Pierce, Newstrom, Dunham & Barber, 1989 cited in Lucas & Heady, 2002).

### **Statement of the Problem**

Most organizations with the aim of attaining higher productivity end up saddling employees with overload of work in order to meet deadline and this might have psychological and physical effects on the employees which may result in something contrary to what these organizations want to achieve. In Nigeria, companies employ a number of stress management strategies which include, paying their employees on time, role modelling, good communication channels, welfare programs, training and development among others, despite all these efforts, there are still reported stress related issues that pose challenges in service delivery (Keraro and Isoe, 2015). Some of the organizations in today’s industries are not developing and employees cannot cope with the stress level there due to inadequate teamwork among the employees which certainly affects the performance of that organization and its employee’s rate of coping with stress in the long run. Huge number of resources is also wasted because of teamwork inadequacies which directly threaten the employee’s stress level.

### **Aim and Objectives of the Study**

The aim of the study is to investigate the impact of stress management on the quality of services in fast-food companies in Rivers State. The objectives of the study include to;

1. examine the relationship between flextime work on the service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State.
2. determine the relationship between flextime work on the service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State
3. ascertain the relationship between flextime work on the service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State

### **Research Questions**

1. What is the relationship between flextime work and service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State?
2. How does flextime work relate to service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State?
3. What is the relationship between flextime work and service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State?

### **Research Hypotheses**

The following null hypotheses were formulated to direct the study;

**HO<sub>1</sub>:** There is significant relationship between flextime work and service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

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**HO<sub>2</sub>:** There is significant relationship between flextime work and service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There is significant relationship between flextime work and service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

## METHODOLOGY

This study was a descriptive survey. Data for the study were gotten from primary and secondary sources. The target population for this study comprised of five (5) branches of five (5) fast-food companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State. The fast-food companies under study includes; Kilimanjaro, Genesis, Pepperoni, Chicken Republic and Happy Bite. There are about 111 employees from the selected branches of fast-food companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State (Table 1). The simple random sampling design was employed in the organization and in order to ensure that the population was given equal chances of being selected for the study.

**Table 1: Population of the Study**

| S/No         | Name of Fast Food Company        | Address                                    | Number of Employees |
|--------------|----------------------------------|--|---------------------|
| 1            | Kilimanjaro                      | 1 Agip Rd, Port Harcourt                   | 26                  |
| 2            | Genesis (Fast Food & Restaurant) | Ikwere Road, Rumuokwuta Rd,                | 33                  |
| 3            | Pepperoni Foods Limited          | 1 East/West Road, Rumuodara, Port Harcourt | 21                  |
| 4            | Chicken Republic                 | Plot 7 Sani Abacha Road                    | 16                  |
| 5            | Happy Bite                       | Lord Emmanuel Drive Rumuola Port Harcourt  | 15                  |
| <b>Total</b> |                                  |  | <b>111</b>          |

## Source: Field Survey, 2024

The sources of data for the study are from both primary and secondary sources. The primary source of data for the study was from structured questionnaire and interviews designed by the researcher while the secondary source was from Publications such as textbooks, journal articles, book reviews, commentaries, encyclopedias etc. The instrument for data collection in this study is a questionnaire. The instrument was divided into two sections. Section A contained demographic information of the respondents while section B was a structured question for respondents to give their score as regards to their own point of view on the statements in the questionnaire

The validity of the instruments was construct and content was constructed and adjusted with the guidelines of the supervisor who is an expert. In order to ascertain the reliability of the instrument, 20 copies of the questionnaire were administered to 20 respondents who were not part of the sample for the study. After two weeks, the same instrument was re-administered to the same people. The two sets of scores were analyzed using Cronbach alpha to ascertain internal consistency of the work

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Response to the research questions were analyzed with five (5) points scale responses, values of 5, 4, 3, 2 and 1 for Strongly Agree (SA), Agree (A), Neutral (N), Disagree (D) and Strongly Disagree (SD) respectively was assigned to responses from which a mid-point mean value will be calculated. The hypotheses will be tested using the Spearman rank Correlation at 0.05 significant level.

### DATA PRESENTATION, ANALYSIS AND DISCUSION OF FINDINGS Data Presentation

**Table 2** Questionnaire Distributed and Returned

|       |                  |    | Frequency | Percent      | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|----|-----------|--------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Kilimanjaro      | 18 | 22.78     | 22.78        | 22.78         | 22.78              |
|       | Pepperoni        |    | 15        | 18.99        | 18.99         | 41.77              |
|       | Chicken Republic |    | 12        | 15.19        | 15.19         | 56.96              |
|       | Happy Bite       |    | 11        | 13.92        | 13.92         | 70.88              |
|       | <b>Total</b>     |    | <b>79</b> | <b>100.0</b> | <b>100.0</b>  |                    |

**Source:** Research data, 2019

A total number of eighty-seven (87) copies of the questionnaire were distributed to five (5) selected fast-food companies in Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria. Seventy-nine (79) questionnaires were appropriately filled and returned while eight (8) were not returned or properly filled so they were discarded.

**Table 3** Years of Working Experience Valid Cumulative

|                    | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|--------------------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid 1 to 5 years | 33        | 41.77   | 41.77         | 41.77              |
| 6 to 10 years      | 20        | 25.32   | 25.32         | 67.09              |
| 11 to 15 years     | 11        | 13.92   | 13.92         | 81.01              |
| 16 years and above | 15        | 18.99   | 18.99         | 100.0              |
| Total              | 79        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

**Source:** Research data, 2019

From table 3 above 33 respondents have worked from 1-5 years 41.77% of responses. 20 respondents have worked from 6-10 years representing 25.32% of the respondents. 11 respondents representing 13.92% has worked for a period 11-15 years. 15 respondents representing 18.09% of the total number of the respondents has worked for a period of sixteen (16) years and above.

**Table 4** Age Distribution of Respondents

| Valid | Frequency        | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|------------------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
|       | 30 years & below | 46.84   | 46.84         |                    |
|       | 37               |         |               |                    |

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|                |    |       |       |     |
|----------------|----|-------|-------|-----|
| 31-35          | 16 | 20.25 | 20.25 | 100 |
| 36-40          | 17 | 21.52 | 21.52 |     |
| above 40 years | 9  | 11.39 | 11.39 |     |
| Total          | 79 | 100.0 | 100.0 |     |

Source: Researcher Data, 2024

From table 4 above indicates that 41 respondents are below the age of thirty (30) which represents 50% of the total respondent, 17 respondents 31-35 years, representing 20.73% of the total number of respondents, 11 respondents are 36-40 years representing 13.42% of the response while 13 respondents are above 40 years which represent 15.85%.

Table 5 Marital Status of Respondents

|       |           | Frequency | Percent | Valid Percent | Cumulative Percent |
|-------|-----------|-----------|---------|---------------|--------------------|
| Valid | Single    | 49        | 62.02   | 62.02         | 62.02              |
|       | Married   | 27        | 34.18   | 34.18         | 96.20              |
|       | Separated | 3         | 3.8     | 3.8           | 100.0              |
|       | Total     | 79        | 100.0   | 100.0         |                    |

Source: Research data, 2019

From the table 5 above the marital records of the respondents indicates that 49 respondents representing 62.02% are single, while 27 respondents representing 34.18% are married. Finally, 3 respondents representing 3.80% had voided marriage.

Data Analysis

The items for each variable in the conceptual framework are analyzed using simple arithmetic mean and standard deviations. They are shown in the following tables;

Table 6 Flextime Work (n=79)

|   | N | Minimum | Maximum | Sum  | $\bar{x}$ | Std.<br>Dev. |
|---|---|---------|---------|------|-----------|--------------|
| We are always provided time for rest in my company <sup>79</sup>              | 1 | 5       | 307     | 3.89 | 1.2       |              |
| I am paid my full remuneration even when I am on leave programs <sup>79</sup> | 0 | 5       | 329     | 4.16 | 0.85      |              |
| Work is always shared among employees in my company <sup>79</sup>             | 1 | 5       | 318     | 4.03 | 0.94      |              |
| I can take a break when I am sick <sup>79</sup>                               | 1 | 5       | 312     | 3.95 | 1.36      |              |

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**Valid N (listwise)** 79

**Source:** Computed Field Survey data, 2019

**Table 7 Service Reliability (n=79)**

|  | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | $\bar{x}$ | Std. Dev. |
|--|----|---------|---------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| <b>Services offered in my company are Consistence</b>                                  | 79 | 1       | 5       | 272 | 3.44      | 1.3       |
| <b>Timeliness is a major attribute of service delivery</b>                             | 79 | 1       | 5       | 318 | 4.03      | 1.08      |
| <b>There is assurance of providing services as expected to customers in my company</b> | 79 | 1       | 5       | 313 | 3.96      | 1.1       |
| <b>There is truthfulness in services offered my company</b>                            | 79 | 1       | 5       | 339 | 4.29      | 1.09      |

**Valid N (listwise)** 79

**Source:** Computed Field Survey data, 2019

**Table 8 Service Tangibility (n=79)**

|  | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | $\bar{x}$ | Std. Dev. |
|--|----|---------|---------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| <b>The fast-food company I work provide services as they have said</b>           | 79 | 1       | 5       | 326 | 4.13      | 1.1       |
| <b>My company deliver expected standard services at all time</b>                 | 79 | 1       | 5       | 316 | 4.00      | 0.95      |
| <b>The fast-food company I work offers basic services with additional extras</b> | 79 | 0       | 5       | 354 | 4.48      | 0.78      |
| <b>The level of services offered in the fast-food company I work are perfect</b> | 79 | 1       | 5       | 341 | 4.32      | 0.95      |

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Valid N (listwise) 79

Source: Computed Field Survey data, 2019

Table 9 Service Empathy (n=79)

|   | N  | Minimum | Maximum | Sum | $\bar{x}$ | Std. Dev. |
|---|----|---------|---------|-----|-----------|-----------|
| Customer attention is very important for my work        | 79 | 1       | 5       | 330 | 4.18      | 1.11      |
| We always provide individual attention to our customers | 79 | 1       | 5       | 306 | 3.87      | 1.31      |
| I always have the interest of our customers at heart    | 79 | 0       | 5       | 343 | 4.34      | 0.74      |
| I understand each of our customer's specific needs      | 79 | 1       | 5       | 314 | 3.97      | 0.84      |
| Valid N (listwise)                                      | 79 |         |         |     |           |           |

Source: Computed Field Survey data, 2019

Testing of Hypotheses

Decision: if sig = p > 0.05 the hypothesis is rejected  
If sig = p ≤ 0.05 the hypothesis is accepted.

Hypothesis 1

HO1: There is no significant relationship between flextime work and service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

Table 10 Correlation between Flextime Work and Service Reliability

|                |                           |             | Flextime Work | Service Reliability |
|----------------|---------------------------|-------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Flextime Work Coefficient | Correlation | 1.000         | .505*               |
|                | Sig. (2-tailed)           |             | .             | .000                |
|                | N                         |             | 79            | 79                  |



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|   |       |       |
|---|-------|-------|
| Service Reliability Correlation Coefficient | .505* | 1.000 |
| Sig. (2-tailed)                             | .000  | .     |
| N   | 79    | 79    |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
The hypothesis testing results shows that the probability value is 0.000 which is less than the critical value of 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypotheses is accepted which states that,  
**HA1:** There is a significant relationship between flextime work and service reliability of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Again, the correlation coefficient of 0.505 shows the strength of relationship between flextime work and service reliability is very moderate.

Hypothesis 2

**HO2:** There is no significant relationship between flextime work and service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

Table 11 Correlation between Flextime Work and Service Tangibility

|                |                     |                         | Flextime Work | Service Tangibility |
|----------------|---------------------|-------------------------|---------------|---------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Flextime Work       | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000         | .620*               |
|                |                     | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .             | .000                |
|                |                     | N                       | 79            | 79                  |
|                | Service Tangibility | Correlation Coefficient | .620*         | 1.000               |
|                |                     | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000          | .                   |
|                |                     | N                       | 79            | 79                  |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).  
The hypothesis testing results shows that the probability value is 0.000 which is less than the critical value of 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypotheses is accepted which states that,  
**HA2:** There is a significant relationship between flextime work and service tangibility of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Again, the correlation coefficient of 0.620 shows the strength of relationship between flextime work and service tangibility is very strong.

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Hypothesis 3

**HO<sub>3</sub>:** There is no significant relationship between flextime work and service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State.

**Table 12 Correlation between Flextime Work and Service Empathy**

|                |                 |                         | Flextime<br>Work | Service<br>Empathy |
|----------------|-----------------|-------------------------|------------------|--------------------|
| Spearman's rho | Flextime Work   | Correlation Coefficient | 1.000            | .432*              |
|                |                 | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .                | .000               |
|                |                 | N                       | 79               | 79                 |
|                | Service Empathy | Correlation Coefficient | .432*            | 1.000              |
|                |                 | Sig. (2-tailed)         | .000             | .                  |
|                |                 | N                       | 79               | 79                 |

\*. Correlation is significant at the 0.05 level (2-tailed).

The hypothesis testing results shows that the probability value is 0.000 which is less than the critical value of 0.05. The null hypothesis is rejected and the alternate hypotheses is accepted which states that,

**HA<sub>2</sub>:** There is a significant relationship between flextime work and service empathy of fast-food companies in Rivers State. Again, the correlation coefficient of 0.432 shows the strength of relationship between flextime work and service empathy is very moderate.

CONCLUSION

Stress management has a positive significant effect on the quality-of-service delivery in fast-food companies in Rivers State. It has concluded that Flexibility in work would benefit the organization through reliable, tangible and empathy in service delivery. Also, the workers are become more enthusiastic to balance the need of the work and their personal life. Most of the organizations had recognized the need of the flexibility in work which ultimately benefits the organization to achieve its goals.

The analysis and interpretation of this study gives a good explanation about the effects of organizational culture and stress on service delivery. To determine appropriate culture for all organizations is very impossible as this depends on the different contexts in which the organizations operate.

RECOMMENDATIONS

Based on the findings of the study, the following recommendations were made;

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1. Organizations and manufacturing and servicing companies should engage in flexible work arrangement for their staff since offering flexible working to employees can boost staff morale and improve their physical and mental well-being.
2. Team of employees should be engaged in work schedule to enhance service quality
3. Employees must be allowed much control over their jobs. The more control, the more job satisfaction and organizational commitment.
4. Hence organizations should enhance the concept of teamwork among its employees to increase the level of productivity and creativity in order to earn competitive advantages and enhance each employee's performance.

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