

Sedentary Hours At Work And Health Challenges Among Civil Servants At The Rivers State Secretariat Complex, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria.

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Abstract: The study examined the Sedentary Hours at Work and Challenges among Civil Servants at the Rivers State secretariat complex, Port Harcourt, Rivers State Nigeria. It used the Cross sectional survey design. The study was delimited to the thirty ministries at the Rivers state secretariat complex. A multi-stage sampling technique was used to carry out the study. A cluster sampling techniques was used to select two ministries from each of the five blocks of A B C, podium block and point block. The respondents were stratified into male and female staff, junior and senior staff. A list of respondents was taken to exclude visitors. A 64-item structured questionnaire was distributed proportionately to the ministries, while oral interview and focus group discussion were conducted with ten respondents each who responded positively to five out of the thirteen health challenges under study. The ecological model of health behavior was used to explain the study. The Result showed that workers sit for 3-7 hours each working day without getting up. Number of hours at work was significantly related to the health challenges. Stress was the commonest health challenge followed by eye problem, musculo-skeletal discomfort, but oral interview result showed musculo-skeletal discomfort as the commonest. Other health challenges were present with lesser percentages. There was no significant association between gender and health challenges except for diabetes which was common with men. The number of hours at work was associated with organizational culture, work load and increasing reliance on technology. It was concluded that workers should use the stair case more than the elevators when climbing up.

Keywords: Sedentary hours at work, health challenges, civil servants at the Rivers State Secretariat Complex

1. INTRODUCTION

Social illnesses resulting from war, terrorism, rioting, ecological devastation, famine, drug abuse, suicide, unemployment and communicable disease are mostly reported than occupational diseases and accidents. Some occupations tie workers down and reduce their chances of physical activities and increase their susceptibility to illnesses. This is partly because overtime, technology in workplaces has made many changes to how people work. Many workers spend a large part of their work day sitting down, focus on their computer screen. With computers and the use of E-mails, the reason for which people used to move around the offices no longer exists. Routine part of office work, such as hand delivery of documents, walking over to co-workers to discuss or share work are now done with computers. Prolonged sitting reduces body movement and make muscles more likely to pull, cramp or strain when stretched suddenly. This can lead to fatigue in the back and neck muscles because it slows the blood supply and put tension on the spine. The lower back or neck are usually affected giving rise to musculo-skeletal discomfort. Those who work at the computer everyday regularly suffer from these problems. More than half of them suffer from tension and pain in the shoulder and neck, some have back problems and some suffer from eye problems and headaches[1]. Research has proven that too much sitting for long stretches of time can be detrimental to health, even if exercise is done regularly. Sedentary hours at work is becoming increasingly common among workers, particularly for those who work in an office environment, with more than 75% of the office workday spent sitting. More than 30 minutes sitting at a time is said to be damaging to health. Those who do so constantly are

at risk of cardiovascular disease, anxiety, depression, cancer, diabetes and obesity [2]. [3] attributed the causes of cardiovascular diseases to sedentary Hours at work. [4] similarly opined that lack of exercise causes heart diseases and increases death rate by 52 percent for men and 28 percent for women, a situation he equated with abandoning an old car without usage for a long time. The occupational pattern of the civil servants fit into this description. From drivers to the permanent secretaries, their work involves less of energy expenditure and long hours of sitting and repetitive job processes. Occupational health and work environment are the most valuable asset of individuals, communities and countries. It is a very important strategy not only to ensure the health of workers but also to contribute positively to productivity, quality of products, work motivation, job satisfaction resulting in the overall quality of life of individuals and society. Unfortunately, most organizations do not recognize occupational health as a strategic enabler for sustained economic growth especially in developing countries. They do not measure business performance with respect to occupational health and safety; as a result, there is no incentive for stakeholders to improve on their workers' health. Many view investing in occupational health and safety as luxury that will reduce profit enhancement [5]. They fail to realize that a safe working environment would go a long way to increasing the productivity of their employees and profit to the organization. Neither do they consider that a good occupational health and safety record can also become a source of competitive advantage. [6] reported that about 2.34 million people die every year from occupational accidents and diseases, 2.02 million deaths are from work related diseases. Out of 6,300 work

related deaths that occur every day, 5,500 are caused by work related diseases. 160 million cases of non-fatal work-related diseases occur annually. In Nigeria, the common complain of workers with their employers are lack of policy implementation, non-payment of salaries and allowances, minimum wage, and issues bordering on national economy which the Nigerian labour congress is always at the forefront to dialogue. The issue of occupational hazards and health implications has rarely been in contention. NLC tend to ignore occupational hazards; this may not be far from the fact that there are many contending issues about employments or ignorance of short-term effect and long-term effects of occupational hazards. [7] report on protecting workers health has it that many employers neglect the health of the employee by not making adequate provision for medical care, and there is lack of regulation of occupational health and safety standards in many countries. They fail to realize that occupational diseases and psychological stress can aggravate other health problems [8]. Furthermore, that conditions of employment, occupation and position in the work place hierarchy, working under stress or with bad employment conditions, affect health as well [9]. Since it is obvious that economically active people spend an average of their lifetime at the workplace, it is necessary to look at the effect of sedentary hours at work and its effects on the civil servants at the Secretariat complex. This is because they carry out all the functions of government as it relates to infrastructural development and social service delivery which is beneficial to every citizen. The fact remains that their welfare is often neglected and rarely explored. Most studies carried out about occupational hazards have been about oil companies and manufacturing industries, for example the work of [10] on occupational hazards among oil industry workers in Rivers state, [11], on occupational hazards of cement manufacturing company. Scholars have carried out studies on job performance, for example [12], motivation in work places, job environment and performance in organization believing that these are factors responsible for high productivity and efficiency but little or nothing is said about the number of hours spent on sedentary work and how it can affect their health. It therefore exposes empirical gap suggesting insufficient literature on sedentary hours at work and health challenges among civil servants especially in River state. The aim of the study is to investigate sedentary work pattern and health challenges of civil servants at the Rivers State Secretariat Complex, Port-Harcourt. Specific objectives are to examine the relationship between sedentary hours at work and health challenges of civil servants and the relationship between position on the job and health challenges among civil servants.

2. METHODOLOGY

The population of this study consist of 4,252 (four thousand, two hundred & fifty-two) civil servants working at the secretariat complex in 30 ministries, from the office of the head of service [13]. It includes all the workers from drivers to permanent secretaries. Only permanent staff were considered eligible for the study. The sample size of 354 was derived by using the Taro Yamane formula, and expressed thus: $n = \frac{N}{1+N(e)^2}$ A multi stage sampling technique was used to carry out this

investigation. Stage one involved using cluster sampling technique to select two ministries from each of the five blocks. Block A, B, C, Podium block and Point block. Block A has 2 ministries (Ministry of health and ministry of Agriculture), block B (Ministry of budget and economic planning, ministry of culture & tourism, Block C (Ministry of Finance, Ministry of local government affairs, Podium block, ministry of information and communication, ministry of education, Point block, ministry of power, office of the head of service, Stage two; involved stratifying the staff of the ministries selected into senior and junior categories, male and female, Stage three; involved making a list of respondents in each of the offices to exclude visitors. Stage four involved distribution of questionnaire randomly to listed respondents. Stage five; involved selecting 10(ten) respondents each who agreed to having at least five out of the thirteen health challenges listed in the questionnaire for oral interview and focus group discussion. The 354 copies of questionnaire were distributed proportionately to the ministries. The responses were coded and later arranged into themes. The retrieved questionnaire data were analyzed using descriptive statistics and percentages with the aid of SPSS version 21.

3. RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Relationship between number of hours spent at work and health challenges

Appendix 1 showed Chi-Square tests of the relationship between number of hours spent at work and health challenges. It was found that there was a statistically significant association between the number of hours spent at work and health challenges of respondents, including stress ($p < 0.001$), eye problem ($p < 0.001$), musculo-skeletal discomfort ($p < 0.001$), hypertension ($p < 0.001$), depression ($p < 0.001$), injuries at work ($p < 0.001$), diabetes ($p < 0.001$), obesity ($p = 0.005$) and cancer ($p = 0.025$). However, health challenges such as asthma, deep vein thrombosis and epilepsy ($p > 0.05$). See table 5.

Relationship between position on the job and health challenges

Appendix 2, the Chi-Square test was used to show the relationship between position on the job and health challenges. Only asthma and epilepsy were found to be significantly related with position on the job. Among the respondents who reported suffering from asthma, 8 (34.8%) were junior staff and 15 (65.2%) were senior staff and this difference was statistically significant ($p < 0.001$). Also epilepsy was found to be significantly more common among senior staff than among junior staff, 37.5% and 62.5% respectively, $p = 0.015$. Other health challenges examined did not show any statistically significant association with position on the job. See table 6 for details.

Position on the job and health challenges. Result showed asthma (34.8% n 8) for junior staff and 15 (65.2%) for senior staff. The demographic data has shown decrease in the number of junior workers, which could have affected the result, cultural issue of who should know about such chronic diseases would have influence the report of asthma. This is a respiratory condition associated with stuffy office space, decaying infrastructure, irregular

power supply and presence of black soot at the secretariat are enough factors to make anyone ill. The result corroborated Rivers State ministry of health sustainable development plan report of 2000-2015 which has respiratory infection as one of the commonest health challenges in Rivers state due to environmental degradation as a result of oil exploration, also data from attendance register of the civil servant clinic showed that upper respiratory tract infection is one of commonest health challenges people presented with.

4. CONCLUSION

It was concluded that Sedentary work pattern is detrimental to health and The results so far showed that civil servants suffer from thirteen health challenges with stress being the commonest as a result of sedentary pattern of work. Health they say is wealth, and so the importance of health to productivity cannot be over-emphazed.

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Authors Profile

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APPENDIX 1: Chi-Square test showing relationship between number of hours spent at work and health challenges

Health challenges	Number of hours spent at work					χ^2	p-value
	3-4 hours	4-5 hours	5-6 hours	6-7 hours	≥ 7 hours		
Stress	66 (31.7%)	74 (35.6%)	30 (14.4%)	14 (6.7%)	24 (11.5%)	38.637	<0.001*
Eye problem	50 (30.1%)	37 (22.3%)	28 (16.9%)	21 (12.7%)	30 (18.1%)	21.638	<0.001*
Musculo-skeletal discomfort	33 (25.8%)	23 (18.0%)	22 (17.2%)	22 (17.2%)	28 (21.9%)	47.589	<0.001*
Hypertension	16 (18.2%)	16 (18.2%)	14 (15.9%)	12 (13.6%)	30 (34.1%)	44.560	<0.001*
Depression	37 (46.8%)	14 (17.7%)	10 (12.7%)	14 (17.7%)	4 (5.1%)	35.537	<0.001*
Injuries at work	18 (29.0%)	7 (11.3%)	17 (27.4%)	12 (19.4%)	8 (12.9%)	28.746	<0.001*
Diabetes	2 (5.7%)	8 (22.9%)	11 (31.4%)	7 (20.0%)	7 (20.0%)	23.966	<0.001*
Asthma	5 (21.7%)	7 (30.4%)	8 (34.8%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (13.0%)	6.975	0.137
Obesity	2 (10.0%)	4 (20.0%)	9 (45.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5 (25.0%)	14.756	0.005*
Cancer	0 (0.0%)	7 (46.7%)	4 (26.7%)	0 (0.0%)	4 (26.7%)	11.162	0.025*
Deep vein thrombosis	0 (0.0%)	4 (36.4%)	4 (36.3%)	0 (0.0%)	3 (27.3%)	8.164	0.086
Epilepsy	2 (25.0%)	5 (62.5%)	1 (12.5%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	6.891	0.142
Prostate enlargement (n=149)	1 (33.3%)	0 (0.0%)	2 (66.7%)	0 (0.0%)	0 (0.0%)	5.693	0.223

APPENDIX 2: Chi-Square test showing relationship between position on the job and health challenges

Health challenges	Position on the job		χ^2	p-value
	Junior Staff	Senior Staff		
Stress	26 (12.6)	181 (87.4%)	1.500	0.221
Eye problem	19 (11.5%)	146 (88.5%)	0.111	0.738
Musculo-skeletal discomfort	19 (14.8%)	109 (85.2%)	3.273	0.070
Hypertension	11 (12.6%)	76 (87.4%)	0.351	0.553
Depression	10 (12.7)	69 (87.3%)	0.314	0.575
Injuries at work	8 (12.9%)	54 (87.1%)	0.301	0.583
Diabetes	4 (11.4%)	31 (88.6%)	0.010	0.922
Asthma	8 (34.8%)	15 (65.2%)	14.423	<0.001*
Obesity	3 (15.0%)	17 (85.0%)	0.360	0.549
Cancer	1 (6.7%)	14 (93.3%)	0.295	0.587
Deep vein thrombosis	1 (9.1%)	10 (90.9%)	0.041	0.839
Epilepsy	3 (37.5%)	5 (62.5%)	5.935	0.015*