

Prevalence and Determinants of Occupational Stress Among Emerging Occupations in Karu, Nasarawa State

Ekele Samuel*, Okafor Kingsley Chinedu

Department of Community Medicine and Primary Health Care

*Corresponding Author

ABSTRACT

Occupational stress has become a major public health issue, particularly among individuals engaged in emerging occupations that often lack job security, structured working conditions, and welfare benefits. These occupations such as POS operators, dispatch riders, and online vendors are increasingly common in Nigeria, yet little is known about the psychological challenges faced by these workers. This study aimed to assess the prevalence and identify the key determinants of occupational stress among individuals in emerging occupations in Karu, Nasarawa State, Nigeria. A descriptive cross-sectional study design was employed, recruiting 422 participants engaged in emerging occupations (including Point-of-Sale operators, gig workers, online vendors, tech-based service providers, and remote workers) within Karu Local Government Area. A snowball sampling technique was used due to the informal and decentralized nature of the population. Data were collected using a semi-structured, interviewer-administered questionnaire that incorporated socio-demographic sections, the Perceived Stress Scale (PSS), and modules on determinants, coping strategies, and morbidity patterns. Data analysis was performed using SPSS version 25, employing descriptive statistics, chi-square tests, and multiple logistic regression to identify significant associations and predictors, with a significance level set at $p < 0.05$. The study revealed an alarmingly high prevalence of occupational stress, with 86.3% of respondents having experienced work-related stress. Notably, 74.4% were classified in the 'High Stress' category, and nearly half (48.3%) reported always feeling stressed. The primary determinants were economic: low or irregular income (Mean Score=4.42) and job insecurity (Mean=4.31) were identified as major contributors. Prevalent stress-related symptoms included fatigue (68.7%), insomnia (68.2%), and anxiety (64.5%). The morbidity pattern showed high rates of musculoskeletal pain (63.5%), gastrointestinal problems (47.6%), and anxiety (44.5%). Coping strategies were predominantly informal, with 76.1% relying on talking to family/friends and 68.2% taking breaks; alarmingly, 28.0% used alcohol or drugs, while only 11.4% sought professional help. Multivariable analysis identified younger age, being a tech-based service provider, long working hours, and using alcohol/drugs as significant predictors of high stress levels. The study concludes that workers in emerging occupations in Karu experience a severe and pervasive level of occupational stress, primarily driven by structural economic insecurities rather than individual factors. This stress manifests in significant physical and psychological morbidity, compounded by a reliance on informal and often maladaptive coping mechanisms due to a critical lack of formal support systems. To address this public health crisis, it is recommended that policymakers expand occupational health and safety regulations to include psychosocial risks for informal workers. Public health interventions should integrate community-based mental health screening and counselling into primary healthcare. Furthermore, digital labour platforms should be encouraged to provide transparent policies and integrate mental health support resources for their workers.

