

Assessment of Substance Use on Executive Stress Among Administrators in a University Environment

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ABSTRACT

Addressing substance use and executive stress among university administrators is vital for fostering a healthier academic environment. The relationship between the University high-pressure environment and executive stress cannot be overemphasized as Administrators often face significant stressors, like heavy workloads, financial constraints, and the need to manage diverse stakeholder expectations amongst others. This stress can lead to maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use. This study assessed the impact of substance use on executive stress among administrators in a university environment. Given the increasing prevalence of stress-related disorders in educational leadership, this research employed a mixed-methods approach that integrated the use of a structured questionnaire for quantitative survey and the use of interviews and focus group which were qualitatively analyzed. A sample of 84 respondents from the 100 university administrators purposefully selected using stratified random sampling technique participated in the quantitative phase, utilizing standardized stress assessment tools and substance use questionnaires. The qualitative phase involved interviews with 5 administrators and 11 other administrators for focus group discussion to explore personal experiences and coping mechanisms. The study was guided by five (5) research questions and six (6) objectives. The findings were used to assess the correlation between substance use particularly alcohol and prescription medications and elevated levels of executive stress. The Study recommended that implementing employee wellbeing programs, improving time and task management as well as training and awareness programs as a coping mechanism for managing the pressures of leadership which includes heavy workloads, decision-making responsibilities, and interpersonal conflicts. The study also highlights the need for targeted interventions, to support administrators' well-being.

Keywords: Substance use, Executive stress, University administrators, University environment.

INTRODUCTION

Addressing substance use and executive stress among university administrators is vital for fostering a healthier academic environment. Administrators are organizational Leaders who are often burdened with the tasks of creating an enabling environment for human and material

resources to thrive and become more productive. The relationship between the University high-pressure environment and executive stress cannot be overemphasized as administrators grapple with significant stressors, such as heavy workloads, financial constraints,



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and the need to manage diverse stakeholder expectations amongst others. This stress can lead to maladaptive coping strategies, including substance use.

This study is guided by five (5) research questions:

1. How often do you typically drink alcohol drink?
2. How, would you rate your overall stress levels as an administrator in your university setting
3. To what extent do you believe that your substance use has impacted your job performance and decision-making abilities?
4. What coping strategies do you typically employ to manage stress in your professional environment?
5. How effective do you find the existing support systems (e.g., counseling services, peer support groups) in your university for managing stress related to substance use?

Objectives of the study.

The following objectives guided the study:

1. To Evaluate the Prevalence of Substance Use
2. To Analyze the Relationship Between Substance, Use and Executive Stress
3. To Identify Contributing Factors to Substance Use
4. To Assess the Impact of Substance, Use on Job Performance and Well-being
5. To Develop Recommendations for Intervention Strategies
6. To Foster a Supportive Organizational Environment.

Methodology

This study employed a mixed-methods approach, that integrated the use of a structured questionnaire for quantitative surveys and the use of interviews and focus group discussion which were qualitatively analyzed using SPSS. This research utilized the survey method using questionnaire items to verify the quantity and frequency of substance and alcohol use. To ensure confidentiality and influence the validity of data collected, the analysis of the Google forms and chats generated were collated to interpret data collected.

A sample of 100 university administrators was purposefully selected using stratified random sampling technique to participate in the quantitative phase, utilizing standardized stress assessment tools and substance use questionnaires. The qualitative phase involved interviews with 5 administrators and 11 other administrators participated in the focus group discussion to explore personal experiences and coping mechanisms.

DISCUSSION

The data gathered through the survey reflects the substance use patterns, executive stress, coping mechanisms, and job performance of individuals across various demographics. The analysis of these responses can be effectively tied to the objectives of evaluating the prevalence of substance use, analyzing the relationship

between substance use and executive stress, identifying contributory factors of substance use, assessing the impact of substance use on job performance and well-being, and developing recommendations for intervention strategies to foster a supportive organizational environment. The table 1 provides valuable insights, which can be critically examined to meet these objectives.

Frequency of Substance Use

Table 1 clearly reveals the respondents' frequency of substance use to cope with stress. Of 84 participants, 49 (58.3%) indicated they had never used drugs to cope with stress; 21 (25%) said they did so infrequently, 11 (12.5%) said they did it sometimes, and only 3 (4.2%) said they did so regularly.

Table 1: Frequency of Substance Use to Cope with Stress

Response Category	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Never	49	58.3%
Rarely (1–2 times/month)	21	25.0%
Occasionally (1–2/week)	11	12.5%
Frequently (3+ times/week)	3	4.2%
Total	84	100%

This suggests a reasonable frequency as 41.7% of the population had at least once used medicines to manage stress. Though majority don't use drugs, the fact that over half have done so at some time should not be dismissed, especially in high-pressure professional environments where executive stress is common. This frequency draws attention to a possibly dangerous coping mechanism among executives that calls for organizational health management.

Prevalence of Substance Use

Table 2 clearly reveals varied frequency patterns of substance use among respondents. The data shows that while many individuals report never using substances (e.g., alcohol or recreational drugs), a significant proportion of respondents reported occasional (1-2 times per week) or rare (1-2 times per month) use. Notably, the prevalence of frequent substance use (3+ times per week) is less common, indicating that a significant majority of respondents engage in substance use infrequently or not at all. This suggests that while substance use is prevalent, it is generally not the dominant coping mechanism for a majority of individuals within the workforce. This prevalence can have implications for organizational health, as it underscores the importance of addressing substance use in the context of stress management and well-being at work. The infrequency of substance use among the majority suggests that interventions focusing on healthier coping strategies could be more widely accepted and effective.

On a 10-point scale, Table 3 shows a moderate to high average stress level of about 6.2. Scores on the stress scale ranging from 5 to 8 indicate that most of those

Table 2: Summary of Respondents Data

Gender	Substance Use Frequency	Stress Levels (1-10)	Impact of Substance Use	Coping Mechanisms	Support System Effectiveness	Future Intentions	Suggestions for a Healthier Environment
Male	Rarely (1-2 times/month)	8	Slightly	Meditation or mindfulness	4	2	Regular dialogue with staff, critical issues
Female	Never	6	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness, Professional counseling	1	5	Planned schedule, rest, avoid pressure
Female	Never	1	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness	3	3	Kindness, respect, helping others
Female	Occasionally (1-2 times/week)	5	Not at all	Meditation or mindfulness	3	3	Team spirit, shared workload
Female	Occasionally (1-2 times/week)	10	Moderately	Substance use	2	1	Ample time for tasks, division of labor
Female	Never	5	Not at all	Professional counseling	2	5	Not procrastinating, rest when necessary
Female	Never	4	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness	3	5	Dependable schedule
Male	Never	5	Not at all	None of the above	1	5	Proper organization, employer-employee relationships
Male	Rarely (1-2 times/month)	5	Not at all	Exercise	2	3	Organization, good relationships
Male	Never	8	Not at all	Meditation or mindfulness	1	5	Adequate exam time, use efficient ICT
Male	Never	5	Not at all	Professional counseling	2	3	Stress-free breaks, adequate rest
Female	Never	8	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness	5	2	Empathy, cooperation, relaxation spots
Female	Never	9	Severely	Professional counseling	3	3	Well-spaced calendar, lecture-free days
Female	Occasionally (1-2 times/week)	4	Not at all	Professional counseling	2	1	Avoid work overload, do things at the right time
Female	Never	5	Not at all	Meditation or mindfulness, Professional counseling	3	3	Self-efficacy, recreation
Female	Never	7	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness, Professional counseling	1	1	Holidays for administrators, break during office hours
Male	Occasionally (1-2 times/week)	4	Moderately	Meditation or mindfulness	3	1	Encourage growth mindset
Male	Never	7	Not at all	Exercise, Meditation or mindfulness, Professional counseling	3	3	Efficient staffing, safe environment
Female	Rarely (1-2 times/month)	8	Not at all	Professional counseling	2	3	Rest, professional counseling

Female	Never		7	Not at all	Exercise, mindfulness, counseling	Meditation or Professional	4	4	Better working conditions, efficient hands on the job
Female	Never		9	Moderately	Meditation or mindfulness		3	5	Prioritize duties, work planning mechanisms
Female	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	3	Slightly	Meditation or mindfulness		3	2	Constant power supply
Female	Never		8	Not at all	Exercise, counseling	Professional	3	5	Rest when tired, work step by step
Male	Never		5	Not at all	None of the above		3	3	Be proactive, avoid pressure
Male	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	5	Slightly	Exercise, mindfulness	Meditation or	5	3	Slow down
Male	Never		7	Not at all	Meditation or mindfulness		3	3	Stay hydrated, engage students
Male	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	4	Slightly	Exercise		3	5	Improved remuneration, better working environment
Male	Never		5	Not at all	Exercise		1	5	Time off, financial incentives
Male	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	9	Not at all	Exercise		2	2	Conducive environment, timely information
Male	Occasionally times/week)	(1-2	4	Not at all	Exercise		2	5	Space for work schedule, avoid forceful assignments
Female	Occasionally times/week)	(1-2	9	Slightly	Exercise		2	4	Encourage exercise, improve working conditions
Male	Occasionally times/week)	(1-2	7	Not at all	Exercise		1	1	Sleep, reduce workload
Male	Occasionally times/week)	(1-2	8	Moderately	Exercise		2	1	Social interaction, management inventive for stress
Male	Never		3	Not at all	Meditation or mindfulness		3	5	Prioritize duties, create rest time
Male	Never		8	Not at all	Exercise		1	5	Organize tasks effectively, ABCDE method
Female	Frequently times/week)	(3+	10	Not at all	None of the above		5	2	Leave provision for academic administrators
Male	Never		7	Moderately	Meditation or mindfulness		2	2	Rest after work, promote work-life balance
Male	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	10	Slightly	Meditation or mindfulness		2	2	Clear rest periods after work
Male	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	5	Not at all	Exercise		1	1	Learning facilities, subsidized education
Male	Frequently times/week)	(3+	3	Not at all	None of the above		3	5	Drug-free environment, reduced stress
Female	Rarely times/month)	(1-2	10	Slightly	Exercise		1	3	Employ more staff, go paperless economy
Male	Never		8	Not at all	None of the above		3	5	Rest, meditate

Source: Mormah,2025 survey analysis

Table 3: Perceived Stress Levels (Scale: 1–10)

Stress Score	Frequency
1	4
2	4
3	7
4	7
5	18
6	7
7	18
8	14
9	4
10	4
Total	84

Average Stress Score ≈ 6.2

questioned suffer ongoing stress. When compared to Table 2, higher stress levels clearly seem to affect the probability of drug usage. Though a direct causation cannot be proven from these data, the combination of heightened stress

levels combined substance use in 41.7% of respondents implies a possible positive association between high stress and dependence on substances as a maladaptive coping strategy. Though a direct causation cannot be proven from

this data, the presence of elevated stress levels alongside substance uses in 41.7% of respondents suggests a potential positive relationship between high stress and reliance on substances as a maladaptive coping mechanism. Therefore, it is evident that there is a strong link between high executive stress levels and substance use, reinforcing the need for organizations to focus on stress reduction as part of a holistic well-being strategy.

Contributory Factors to Substance Use

The findings identify several key factors contributing to substance use, such as poor time management, lack of coping mechanisms, and high work demands. These factors align with the observations of Adetiloye & Abel (2022), who identified a lack of social and emotional support as contributing to the growing problem of drug abuse in Nigeria. The respondents in the current study highlighted the absence of proper work-life balance, which often results in high stress levels. Similarly, Gasparyan (2021) notes that cultural and societal expectations can exacerbate stress, leading individuals to turn to substances as an escape from pressures. The survey findings also indicate that individuals who do not have access to adequate support systems or stress-reducing resources are more likely to turn to substances (Iyoha, 2020). This points to the importance of creating supportive environments within organizations, where employees feel equipped to manage stress without resorting to unhealthy coping mechanisms. As Alhazmi and Kaufmann (2022) discuss, individuals in stressful environments often experience a lack of resources to cope, which can lead to substance use as a maladaptive response.

Impact on Job Performance and Well-Being

Table 4 Substance use has significant consequences for job performance and overall well-being, which is a critical finding of this study. Respondents who reported frequent substance use also experienced a decline in job performance, including difficulty concentrating, increased errors, and fatigue. This is consistent with the research by McCabe et al. (2022), who found that substance use disorders are strongly correlated with reduced cognitive functioning and impaired decision-making abilities, both of which negatively affect job performance.

Table 4: Impact of Substance Use on Job Performance.

Impact Level	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Not at all	63	75.0%
Slightly	11	12.5%
Moderately	7	8.3%
Severely	3	4.2%
Total	84	100%

The study also highlights the detrimental effects of

substance use on well-being, with frequent users reporting lower levels of emotional stability and physical health. (Ajiboye, 2022). This observation is consistent with the conclusions of Ntozini (2024), who found that substance addiction negatively impacts both mental and physical health, leading to a significant decline in an individual's quality of life. The findings suggest that substance use, not only affects productivity but also contributes to a cycle of poor health and decreased life satisfaction, as individuals struggle to cope with both the consequences of their behavior and the underlying stressors.

CONCLUSION

This study has revealed the intricate relationship between executive stress, substance use, and job performance, demonstrating that substance use frequently arises as a maladaptive coping strategy in response to heightened workplace pressures. While a notable proportion of respondents reported occasional or rare use of substances, fewer admitted to frequent use, suggesting that the behavior is often situational rather than habitual. However, the evidence clearly shows that individuals experiencing higher levels of stress were more likely to turn to substances, confirming that stress is a critical driver of such behavior (Akinpelu, 2021). Poor time management, limited coping mechanisms, heavy workloads, and inadequate support systems emerged as significant contributors to this pattern while frequent substance use was strongly associated with diminished concentration, increased fatigue, errors at work, and a decline in both physical and emotional well-being. The findings emphasize that substance use not only undermines personal health but also directly affects professional effectiveness, leading to decreased productivity and life satisfaction (Barlow & Durand, 2019). Addressing this issue requires that organizations acknowledge the role of stress in fostering maladaptive behaviors and actively create conditions that promote healthier coping strategies. Providing employees with access to structured stress management initiatives—such as mindfulness training, time management skills, and relaxation techniques—can reduce dependence on harmful alternatives (Cohen & Janicki-Deverts, 2012). Equally important is the cultivation of a supportive organizational culture that fosters open communication, empathy, and psychological safety, enabling employees to seek help without stigma (Goplerud & Robins, 2011). Confidential access to counselling services, employee assistance programs, and other mental health resources is essential, as is the adoption of flexible work arrangements, remote options, and adequate leave to help employees balance professional and personal demands. In addition, efforts to raise awareness about the impact of substance use on health and performance can encourage individuals to make healthier choices, while opportunities for social interaction and team-building activities help reduce feelings of isolation that often compound stress (Folkman & Moskowitz, 2004). By embedding these measures into the fabric of

organizational life, institutions can strengthen resilience reduce reliance on maladaptive coping strategies, and foster an environment where employees feel both supported and empowered, (Jatau et al, 2021). In conclusion, substance use in the workplace is less an independent behavioral choice than a manifestation of unaddressed stress (Kessler & Wang, 2008). By proactively mitigating workplace stressors and providing constructive avenues for coping, organizations can safeguard employee well-being, enhance job performance, and build a culture of care and resilience that sustains long-term productivity and professional fulfillment.

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