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**EFFECTS OF JOB-STRESS ON EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE IN  
AN ENTERPRISE**

**A microfinance institution in Cameroon**

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<p>In today's business environment, there exist a lot of competition among companies. Employees' performance becomes a major and essential element for a company's success. This performance is significantly hindered by excessive stress encountered in the working environment and this has aroused the attention of many employers. Knowing the factors leading to work stress and its impact on employee performance is vital for any organization to ensure its success and smooth functioning.</p> <p>The aim of this study was to examine the effect of work stress on employee performance in a microfinance institution in Cameroon. The purposive and simple random technique was used to select the sampling size of 80 participants. Data collection was done using questionnaires and focus group discussion.</p> <p>The results reveal that the participants endure excessive amount of stress which negatively affects their performance as many of them opine that management exerts pressure on them to increase their output. Some of the employees affirm that a stress-free program goes a long way to boost their productivity and that of the institution, while others do not see the possibility of this program reducing stress.</p> <p>Considering the steam which microfinance institutions are gaining within the business environment, employees have a very difficult task, and much is expected of them. It is recommended that management need to institute a stress management program to ensure that the employees work in a stress-free environment which enables them to perform better and increase productivity thus achieving the goals of the institution.</p>		

<p><b>Key words</b> Employee Performance, Job Stress, Stress Management.</p>
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## ABSTRACT

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## 1 INTRODUCTION

Nowadays, the microfinance industry has been experiencing substantial changes in their operations. The sector has become more competitive due to the upsurge of other financing institutions and the rising need of customers. These conditions require a microfinance institution (MFI) to provide good quality services and it's expected to perform well in serving the various needs of the customers which are changing daily by offering to them quick, appropriate, and comfortable services. For this to be achievable, a microfinance relies on the inputs of the employees who are often referred to as the lifeblood of every institution. So, for the business operations to be conducted efficiently, it is imperative for the employees to perform at their very best to attain the institution's goals.

Therefore, it is vital for the institution to make serious effort to devise robust strategies or mechanism to keep their employees satisfied and stress free. But in today's work life, employees are generally required to work strenuously for longer hours to meet their expectations about work performance as the demand on them increases daily and this exerts enormous stress on them. As such, the expectation from them equally grew dramatically alongside job stress which significantly affect their performance. This study focuses on analysing and exploring the impacts of job-related stress on employee performance. A microfinance institution (MFI) is chosen to be the case study because of its prominence and it tops the chart as the fastest growing MFI in Cameroon with branches spread over the national territory right into the rural areas and has a wide work force over which this research will be sufficiently carried.

Recently, there have been so many scholarly articles or journals written regarding job related stress so much that one can soundly conclude that everyone everywhere especially within a job setting is depressed and dishearten. As stress keeps hovering over employees, management is hesitant to take up appropriate measures to address them. According to Dyck, (2001, 52.) an employee quality of life can be affected by a couple of job stress factors which can make an assigned task difficult and stressful for the employee to accomplice no matter the environment. According to (Swanson, Scott & Engelke, 2008) work stress may occur because of different factors such as individual, socioeconomic, and family matters. In the hotel industry, (Pulak, 2012) outlines some aspects that are responsible for work stress among hotel workers such as undefined job description, long hours of duty especially those that require standing, unpleasant and hostile working environment etc. Wallace (2003, 14) highlights that employees in the hotel industry are under enormous pressure to deliver high quality services. These creates stress

to employees and can raise so many concerns and issues. It is widely accepted by employees in this sector that stress sap out their performance.

Many researchers argue that stress at workplace has an impact on performance in one way or the other. Dean (2002) view work related stress as a leading cause for low productivity in the workplace. DCS Gaumail, (2003) believes stress affects the organizational outcomes such as decrease in performance, increase in absenteeism and dissatisfaction. In the same breadth, Desseller (2000) concurred that the consequences of organizational stress are far-reaching leading to reduction in the quality and quantity of job performance. According to Frost (2003) hardworking and valuable employees who experience negative experiences in the workplace, have their hopes dashed, their goals derailed and or their confidence undermined. He asserts that organization should endeavour to identify emotional pain, when it occurs and act to intervene, potentially lethal situations in the work place, can be reversed.

The primary objective of this study was to assess the effect of job stress on employee performance in a fast-growing microfinance institution in Cameroon. The secondary objectives include: To explore and understand the extent to which stress affects workers efficiency and productivity in a work setting; to make recommendation about stress management technique to the general management of the said microfinance institution.

This study investigates the effects of stress on employee performance in a microfinance institution. which is the fastest growing microfinance institution in Cameroon and the study concentrated on its branches within Yaoundé central of the Mfoundi division.

There is a number of aspects to which this study was limited and these include, the study was limited in scope as there are other factors that affect the employees' performance; In the collection of data process, respondents were not very open to discussions and were very reluctant in answering the questionnaire in that they took much time to respond despite the continuous calls and many scheduled rendezvous. Financial constraints also had a bearing on this research considering the fact that, its author resides out of Cameroon and could only submit the questionnaires through the help of a proxy and at times discussions were done via call which cost a lot of money.

## **2 EMPLOYEE PERFORMANCE**

Every organisation carries out its operations or tasks through the help of humans, machines, materials, and money. The principal component of an organisation is its human resources that is, 'people at work'. The human resource or workforce serves as the main, generating, and live resource as opposed to other resources which are non-living. Performances can be separated into organisational and employee performance.

### **2.1 The Concept of Employee Performance**

Employee performance is also known as job performance or Individual performance. There is no simple definition of employee performance, there exist a plethora of definitions of the term as there are multiple facets to performance. (Jex 2002, 88) opines that employee performance can generally be defined as all the behaviour employees engage in while at work. It may also refer to the job-related activities of a worker and how well those activities were executed. According to (Hoppock 1957; Kane & Lawler, 1976), job performance is the record related to the results after practicing a job for a given period. On the other hand, (Schermerhorn, 1989) asserts that job performance refers to the quality and quantity that are attained by individual employees or group of employees after completing a given task. (Motowildo & Borman 1993) define job performance as the aggregated financial or non-financial added value by the employees in contribution to the fulfilment both directly and indirectly to the targeted goals of the organisation. Mangkunegara (2009) defines it as the work results based on quality and quantity achieved by employee in doing his or her job. (Rivai & Jauvani 2009) define work performance as the real behaviour express by everyone as work achievement produced by employee appropriate to their role in the organisation. Based on the opinions above, it could be concluded that work performance is a work result of work achievement of one's quality and quantity achieved in an organisation in performing its job.

Employees perform different jobs in an organisation depending upon the nature of the organisation. Individual performance is of high relevance to the organisation and individuals alike. According to Kanfer (2005, 336) showing high performance when accomplishing tasks results in satisfaction, feeling of self-efficacy and mastery. Moreover, those who perform well in their tasks are mostly to get promotion, award, honoured and are more open to career opportunities. A good employee performance

is necessary for the organisation, since the success of the organisation is dependent upon the employee's creativity, innovation, and commitment (Ramlall, 2008). Performance criteria are standards for employee behaviour at work. These criteria contain more than how an employee does the work. Employees are rated on how well they do their jobs compared with a set of standards determined by the employer. Just how much work an employee must do directly affects how well it is done. Employers demand high productivity and high-quality services from employees which must be done in furtherance of the organisation's goals and objectives. If employees have too much work, it can affect how well they perform. If they do not have enough work to do, the business suffers.

## **2.2 Performance Management and Performance Appraisals**

Performance is associated with quantity of output, quality of output, timeliness of output, efficiency and effectiveness of work completed. It is concerned with what job is done, how it is done and what has been achieved. This involves inspecting, analysing, and evaluating the employee's work behaviour and results in relation to the goals and objectives of the organisation. For this to happen, human resource management must utilise human resources in the most optimal manner. Therefore, performance management examines how results are attained because this provides the information necessary to consider what needs to be done to improve those results. In today's turbulent and competitive business environment, the question of survival is of utmost importance because management is under pressure to boost the productivity of its employees to attain a competitive advantage over its rivals. This is the major objective of performance management.

(Weiss & Hartle 1997), aver that performance management is a process for establishing a shared understanding about what is to be achieved and an approach to managing that increases the probability of achieving success. According to Brumbach, it is all about the everyday actions (output or results) and behaviour (input) employees use to improve performance in themselves and others and this cannot be divorced from the managerial processes that pervades the organisation. Thus, Performance management is simply the process of creating a work environment or setting where people are empowered to perform to the best of their abilities. Therefore, its overall goal is to ensure that the organisation and all its subsystems (processes, departments, teams etc.) are working together in an optimum fashion to achieve the results desired by the organisation. Achieving this goal requires a cluster and cooperation of series of activities among which includes: identification and prioritization of desired results, methods to measure the progress made, setting of assessment standards, facilitating the exchange of feedbacks

among participants charged with attaining the desired results, carrying out of periodic review of progress made and reinforcing those activities that have achieve results. Achieving the organisation's goals depends extensively on the individual employee performance. Therefore, it is quite necessary to understand as to what extent employees have been successful at their jobs towards achievement of their goal. Thus, performance appraisal constitutes a vital aspect of human resource management.

According to Alford & Beatty (2013), it's the evaluation or appraisal of the relative worth to the company of a man's services on his job. Flippo (1984) contend that performance appraisal is a systematic, periodic, and impartial rating of the employee's excellence in matters relating to his job and to his potentialities for a better job. It is mainly used for three purposes: it points out employee weaknesses and areas where improvement needs to be done, it is used for selection and development of programs for example it will differentiate satisfactorily performers from unsatisfactory one and used as basis for reward allocation such as increment, promotion etc. An employee performance appraisal is a process—often combining both written and oral elements—whereby management evaluates and provides feedback on employee job performance, including steps to improve or redirect activities as needed. Through it, the management performs functions relating to selection, development, salary, promotion, lay-off and retrenchment. By so doing, it provides an effective way to implement the institution's strategy uniformly and persistently, hence motivating the employee's enthusiasm and productivity.



### **3 THE CONCEPT OF STRESS**

This chapter defines and explains the concept of stress with regards to its definition, terminology, its types, the sources of stress and it further expounds on how stress can be managed to a bearable level. For the purpose of details, this chapter is divided into four subsections with the first developing a conceptual understanding or definition of stress. The second deals with the various types of stress followed by the root causes of stress and ends with ways stress can be managed.

#### **3.1 Definition of Stress**

In today's fast paced world, it is impossible to live without stress. The nature of work has undergone drastic changes with stress appearing almost automatically. It is a worldwide phenomenon that occurs in various forms in every workplace. In today's work life, employees are often required to work strenuously for over long period of time as their responsibilities keep rising. Stress is common in every type of job and people must face it in every facet of life. Stress have been defined in various ways over the years. According to (Ivancevich, Konapske & Matteson, 2006) stress is scientifically described as that response of an individual to the outcomes of the external environmental conditions that place excessive psychological, behavioural, and physiological pressures on that individual. It involves how an individual respond to external pressures. Robbins & Sanghi (2006) defined as a dynamic condition in which an individual is confronted with an opportunity, constraints, or demand related to what he or she desires and for which the outcome is perceived to be both uncertain and important. The World Health organisation (WHO) defines occupational stress as the response people may have when presented with work demands and pressures that are not matched to their knowledge and abilities and which challenge their ability to cope. According to Steve (2011), stress is simply a reaction of an employee when certain demands, pressures and professional aspects which are to be faced at the work place do not match their knowledge levels which create or poses a challenge and threat to the capabilities of the employee which in turn would create a struggle for existence in terms of being employed in a place. This therefore implies that, stress exists when an environmental situation presents a demand threatening to surpass an employee's capabilities and resources. From the descriptions, it can therefore be contending that stress is an excessive demand that affect a person physically and psychologically. It has become a common experience among employees as they perform their day-to-day jobs.

Many researchers aver that stress at work place has an impact to performance in one way or the other. According to (Elovainio, Kivimaki, & Vahtera, 2002), job stress makes the organisational performance go down. It is likened to a chronic disease that is caused by conditions in the workplace that negatively affect an employee's performance. It is normal experience that occurs in reaction to situations that make an employee uncomfortable and on the other hand it may help one to rise above challenges. If that is the case, it will have a positive impact as it can enable an employee to improve on their performance which will result in increased employee motivation at work, innovation and problem-solving. According to (Deshpande & Chopra 2007), good stress which is scientifically referred to as eustress is a positive result of stressful occurrences which creates motivation in people who in turn rise beyond their challenges that they may face to succeed in life. However, stress can be managed up to certain extent after which it becomes negative and negatively affect the employee's performance. Similarly, (Rolfe 2005), explained the importance of job stress as emphasized by employers on how to manage and reduce it through practical guidelines. Among this includes balancing of work life, fair work load, open communication and providing a conducive working environment. Its however necessary for management to monitor employees' stress level because an overly stressed employee will certainly not perform well at work. This is especially so in a microfinance institution in Cameroon where employees have direct contact with customers as the stress will act out on their frustrations with customers, thus ruining the image of the organisation.

### **3.2 Types of stress**

To grasp a better understanding of the concept of stress, most authors categorise stress into different types. (Taylor & Shelley 2006, 441.) outline these different types of stress into chronic, traumatic, and acute. The characteristics and attributes of each type are looked upon in greater detail below and this provides good understanding of how each can be identified and managed.

According to Shelley et al. (2006, 236) chronic stress is one that occurs seemingly for an intermediate period that wears down the person every day with no visible sign of escape. This type is brought about by long-term exposure to stressors such as unhappy marriage, traumatic experience, unwarranted career or job, stress of poverty, relationship conflicts etc. These situations seem to be unending, and the accumulated stress that results from exposure to them can be life-threatening. It tears the individual emotionally and health wise thus leading to break down and death subsequently, Shelley et al. 2006.

Traumatic stress is one that results from a catastrophic event or experience such as an accident or natural disaster etc. Here, many victims start to recover soon after the shock while in some people, their body do not easily return to equilibrium and life too does not return to normal. This is often referred to as post-traumatic stress disorder. The victim develops symptoms like flashbacks or nightmares about the trauma.

Acute stress is the most common and recognisable form of stress. This type is often short-lived and does not result to any permanent damage to the body. It may result from where an individual had a busy day. A busy can create stress but its short term because perhaps tomorrow you are less busy. For example, if your car has a break down on the way, this creates a certain amount of acute stress, but once the car is fixed, there is no stress associated with it.

### **3.3 Causes or Sources of Stress**

Arnold Robertson & Cooper (1991) identified five major causes of job stress: factors intrinsic to the job, relationship at work, career development, role in the organisation and organisational structure and climate. Intrinsic factors as it relates to the job stems from poor working condition This relates to the physical design of the workplace or physical surrounding of the workplace which includes high level of noise, low or inadequate lighting system, heat, poor ventilation, smells and other aspects that hampers the employee's senses and consequently affect his mood and overall mental state. A poorly designed office will create poor communication network among workers who are required to frequently come in contact. This can degenerate to poor working condition and subsequent stress to employees

Long working hours. In a highly competitive business environment, employees are required to work for very long hours. This appear to take a toll on your health and make them suffer high rate of stress. This means that employees who work for long hours with little or no rest or sleep may find themselves and the quality of them suffer. There is also high risk and danger. A job that presents risk and danger to the employee will always subject the employee to high stress level. This is because when an employee is continuously aware of an eminent danger, he is required to respond immediately to it in a rush, respiration changes and muscles become tensioned. These are all threatening to long-term health.

To add, new technology. The advent of modern technology has brought a drastic change in the way work is being done in today's business environment. Their introduction in the working environment has

required workers to continuously adapt to such changes, new equipment, systems, and ways of working. This often is a source of great pressure at work as most workers find these new technologies challenging and difficult to cope with and adapt to it. For instance, someone trained with the latest equipment or method will find it as an extra burden to change from the old ways of work and this may increase the stress level. There is also work overload. This is a situation where the employee has so much work to do within a short deadline. This is often a tremendous source of stress as the employee is expected to do his job within the strict deadline.

Relationship at work. Working with different people in a working environment requires lots of dealings and interaction with them as they work as a team. An employee may face difficulty in understanding other people in the team and this may strain the working relationship and subsequently result in increase in the stress level. Employee need to spend much time in their job and having a poor working relationship with peers will affect the employee adversely.

Career development. In today's working environment, the work force has become so diversified. For a person who is determined to rise to higher positions of responsibility, the challenges have become bigger as the opportunity to learn new skill has become a requirement. The aspiration for employee to grow in his Career causes a lot of stress in that the new opportunities that present themselves require individuals with diversified skills to cope in the competitive business world. Lack of job security, fear of redundancy, obsolescence and numerous performance appraisal can cause tremendous pressure and strain.

### **3.4 How can stress be managed**

There are two ways in which stress can be managed. According to (Robbins, 2004), there are the individual approach and the organisational approach. The individual approach can be achieved in two ways: exercising and opening to someone. With regards to exercising, an employee can manage by going on a walk, jogging, playing tennis, dancing, and swatting squash balls. Most runners and fitness experts posit that, when one is engaged in an exercise, it will very difficult for that individual to focus on job stress. Again, relaxation plays a vital role in curbing stress. In a state of great or deep relaxation, the employee is physically relaxed and detached from the stress-causing situation. Relaxation exercises reduce the employee's heart rates, blood pressure and other indicators of stress.

Another way to ease stress individually is opening to someone. This involves confiding in a trusted person a personal crisis. The act of confiding is a big sigh of relief to the employee. This self-disclosure goes a long way to reduce stress and give a more positive outlook on life.

Robbins (2004) explains that, the organisational approach to stress management may involve the organisation elaborating and implementing training programs for employees, improving on the personnel policies, ensuring free communication environment as well as providing technical support to workers. In the same vein, Lucey (1994) provides that stress can be managed within an organisation by increasing or decreasing personal responsibility, job rotation and transfer, allow more flexible hours, providing social or recreational amenities like social/fitness clubs, outings and the organisation can institute counselling services.

If these measures are carefully instituted and implemented, it is evident the stress level on employee will sufficiently be minimised or avoided. Little or no amount of stress will enable an employee to perform his or her job better.

#### 4 RELATIONSHIPS BETWEEN JOB STRESS AND JOB PERFORMANCE

Stress being a status happens when an individual recognises that the conditions that are facing them maybe more than their endurance. It results from an imbalance between demand and resources. Job stress has become a frequent problem across occupations as many organisations nowadays demand a lot from their employees to outrun their competitors. This has led to the built up of numerous stressors that further create challenging and stressful situations for individuals.

Several studies concluded have shown that job stress negatively affect employee performance considering the various factors involved and especially employee job satisfaction. This has been confirmed by recent studies (Ahmed & Ramzan, 2013) shows that, there exist a negative correlation between job stress and employee performance. A study similar to this was conducted which reveals that factors such as workload, role conflict and inadequate monetary reward are prime source of stress that decreases employee performance. Furthermore, Jeyarai, (2013) investigated the impact of occupational stress among teachers and found out that, stress causes teachers to absent, increase tendency to quit and less likely to pursue teaching career, hence negatively correlated. The relationship that exist between these two has been very contentious as it animates within the academic cycles. However, there is surprisingly a mixed result within different organisational setting. Four types of relationship has been projected to exist which include: the negative linear relationship which is to the effect that productivity decreases with stress, stress which is not negative can have tremendous impact in that productivity may increase as a consequence of stress (eustress), thereby implying a positive relationship between the two, thirdly, there can be a U-shaped or curved relationship whereby delicate stress may increase productivity ab initio up to a certain level or peak and thereafter it declines as the person gradually descends into a state of distress. Fourthly, there can be no relationship between the two.

Depending on its level, job stress can either be helpful or harmful to job performance. When it's absent, job challenge is limited, and performance become low. But as stress gradually increases, job performance trends to increase because stress helps the employee to gather and use resources to meet the job requirements. It could be said that constructive (eustress) instils encouragement among employees and helps them tackle the job challenges. At this level, stress can be referred to as a fertilizer of creativity as it pushes the employee to perform beyond his/her limits to get the job done and thus increases his productivity. As this continuous, there comes a point in time where stress reaches its point of saturation which corresponds to the employee's day-to-day performance capabilities. Beyond this

point, stress shows no sign of improvement to his/her performance. Excessive stress (distress) is damaging because it interferes with the employee's ability to perform as such performance begins to decline sharply to a point where the employee loses the ability to cope with, can't make an appropriate decision and portrays inconsistent behaviour. When it gets to the breaking stage, the employee becomes devastated and no longer feels as to work, at this point performance becomes zero. This may lead to absenteeism and consequently the employee may resign or get fired.

Job related stress according to Maneze (2005) has been interpreted by most companies as a low alarming situation but it poses a very high impact on individual's health that also affect directly his/her performance. Accordingly, the upward trend of job stress has become a major challenge to employers as it reduces performance level in jobs, growing cases of absenteeism, contributes to the employee involvement in drugs and alcoholism. A study on the impact of job stress carried out by Mead (2000), pointed out that there exists a negative impact of job stress on employee performance if the stress is not managed efficiently. Consequently, stress negatively impacts both the productivity and the organisation.

Productivity according to (Mathis & Jackson, 2000) is simply the measure of the quality and quantity of work done in relation to the cost of the resources it took to do the work. These authors suggest that to measure the human resource productivity in an organisation, one has to consider the unit labour cost or the total labour cost per unit of output. They stated further that the performance of an individual depends on three factors which include the ability to work, the level of effort and the support given to that person. Therefore, the relationship that exist amongst these three factors is that Performance (P) is the result of Ability (A) times Effort (E) times Support (S) i.e.  $P=A \times E \times S$ . From this it is shown that if any of the factor is reduced or absent, such will have an adverse effect on (P). That is to say, performance will shrink. (Chase & Aquilano, 1995) that though productivity is measured in terms of output labour hour, this does not imply that the company will make more money because extra output may not be sold but accumulates as inventory. So, in order to test increase in productivity, a couple of questions must be asked. These questions may include: what action has been taken? Has the action taken increase output or has it decrease inventory? did the action decrease operational expense? Therefore, with these in mind, productivity can then be defined as all the actions that can bring the company closer to its goals. Therefore, management must take in to consideration all counter-productive behaviour that may result from stress (Steers 1991). Thompson & Hugh, (1995) contend that results from a misfit situation between the individual behaviour and their environment that pushes the individual's capabilities beyond his/her abilities. But then, no two people will react in same way if put in the same situation or environment. This is because every individual has his/her own personal factors which might have an influence on

stress. Bowin & Harvey (2001) also assert that people cannot separate their work and personal life issues as the way they react, and handle stress varies, and it is a complex issue. According to Blumenthal (2003), if stress increases beyond an optimal point, performance peaks and suddenly decreases thereafter. He further argues that excess stress is detrimental to an individual's productivity and wellbeing, causing dysfunction or disruption in multiple areas. Consequently, this extends to affect the organization and productivity is decreased. Most corporations have become increasingly aware of the problems caused by stress as it has significant economic implication on the corporation.

Stress be it work or non-work-related, can have profound effect on the organisation. As earlier stated in this study, moderate amount of stress is beneficial to the organisation. But when it reaches a level where the individual struggles to cope, both mental and physical change might occur. Some of the outcomes of stress on the organisation can include employee job satisfaction, employee turnover, absenteeism, reduced performance and lack of productivity and efficiency. Views express by some employees reveal that the duration of absences resulting from stress outnumber those that result from other causes. They further reveal that, when they faced with unbearable work-related stress, they often absent from work and return weeks after. The negative impact of these on the organisation is far-reaching. For example, in an institution which is predominantly involve in customer services, conspicuous absenteeism leads to a vicious cycle in that individual stress impacts team stress which in return impacts stress on the customers. As Ayuk Sidonie, an employee working with the said microfinance institution Biyam-Assi aver, they often work under enormous pressure when one or two of their colleague is absent from work. When this happens, the work load increases, there is bound to be conflict and delays in relating with customers or customer service. This slows down the operation of the institutions as they are under staffed or inadequate manpower. This affects customer satisfaction as most customers complain of slow and poor-quality services. Consequently, this impacts the company profitability significantly.

Stress reduces the productivity and efficiency of the organisation. Although the effect of absenteeism is obvious, reduced productivity and efficiency is often the case when employees are stressed and are working under pressure. An employee working under enormous pressure is less incline to think, be innovative or creative with regards to various initiatives or problem solving. At this stage, they possess or exhibit very little energy which is reflected in their minimum level of productivity which does not meet the high demands placed or expected of them, the employees in the competitive market. Stress and its management is a reality in today's business world. There is need for an organisation to monitor and implement measure to reduce stress for all employee. This can be done by creating programs and initiatives that address stress related issues.



From the foregoing, stress can both be good and the same time harmful to the employee's performance. So, for optimum performance to be attained, stress need not to be too high nor too low. It must be at a tolerate rate whereby the employee can manage and excel in his/her performance. When stress is within a limit that can be controlled, it will be beneficial and productive as opposed to one which cannot be uncontrolled. Therefore, the management of every organisation has that responsibility to consider their employees as an asset and not a work slave. Effort and practical guideline must be instituted to monitor and manage the level of work stress that arise in every working environment. By so doing, employee productivity and growth of the organisation will be assured, guarantee and its goals are met to succeed in the competitive market.

## **5 RESEARCH DESIGN AND METHODOLOGY**

Research methodology is the road map or itinerary used by this researcher to accomplish the goals of this research. This chapter describes the research design which has been used in this study, the various procedures and processes employed to collect and analyse data.

### **5.1 Research Design**

This Research design enable researcher to get answers regarding the research questions as well as to test or confirm the hypotheses of this study. It did serve as a guide and much more a plan during this research. This was done by way of step-by-step approach which involved selecting the research method, research technique, sampling size and method and the last step describes the technique of analysing data. According to Flick (2012), the nature of the research design indicates the nature of the research and lays down the structure of the research. Predominantly, the descriptive research design was adopted which enabled the researcher to assess stress and its effects on employees' productivity in a microfinance institution in Cameroon. By this, the researcher had ample space to observe, describe and document various aspects of how work-related stress occurs. This strategy is adopted because it enables the researcher to collect large amount of data from a sizable population in an economical manner while presenting a more accurate picture of events at a given time. Descriptive research is designed precise information concerning a current phenomenon and draw possible conclusion wherever.

### **5.2 Study area and Target population**

Mfoundi division is located in Yaoundé which is the headquarters of the centre region and the political capital of Cameroon. It one of the nine divisions that make up the centre region with enormous concentration of intense economical activities, making it highly competitive business area. According to Agyedu et al. (1999), the target population in a research project refers to a group of individuals, objects or events that have a common or similar feature in which a researcher is interested in. They further opine that, the target population in a research study must be clearly defined and identified. In this light, this research focused on the staffs of the said microfinance institution within the Mfoundi division.

### **5.3 Sample and Sampling Technique**

According to Saratankos (2005), the use of sampling is very important in research because it enables the researcher to select a portion or section of the population to represent the entire population from which he/she obtains relevant information with the use of appropriate sampling techniques. The study is based on both the probability and non-probability technique and in collecting samples, it was necessary to employ the purposive and random sampling techniques. Here, a closed-ended questionnaire was used to collect the main data for this study. As earlier stated, this study was conducted in the Mfoundi division which play host to about 200 branches of the masked microfinance institution with most concentrated or are found in Yaoundé central. Using the non-probability sampling technique to distribute the questionnaires, a total of about 100 employees in various branches in Yaoundé were selected as sample for the study representing about 20% of the population. (Amedeho 2002) pointed out that, a sampling size of 5-20% is ideal to represent the entire population. This involves employees of both sex, all ranks and departments beginning from those at the front desk to those at the top of management with each given equal opportunity so as to get a better result. In this regard, collection of information was facilitated by the use of personal interviews in that it allowed this researcher to discover additional information and to pursue an idea or response in greater details; it gave me the opportunity to interact closely with the respondent in answering the questionnaire. And lastly, I had the chance to explain to the respondent any difficulty they found in understanding questions in the questionnaire.

### **5.4 Sources of data**

The chief sources of data in this research were both primary and secondary data. Primary data is one firstly or freshly collected by the researcher. It is mainly collected by way of questionnaires, interviews and by observation. In this study, primary data was collected using questionnaires which were distributed among the sampling population size. The questionnaires were design in an easy and unambiguous way to enable the respondent to understand the questions. The questions were divided into closed and open-ended. The Closed-ended ended questions which were centred on issues that directly relates to the research topic were intended to restrict and control the respondent's answer in regard to the research objectives and this also provided an objective base for comparative analysis. The open-ended questions on the other hand were intended to give the respondent the freedom to express their views without any constrain or restrictions. In a bid to supplement these responses in the questionnaire, this research went

further to engage some of the respondents in an interview with the intention to verify and confirm the answers in the questionnaire.

Primary data once used, become secondary data for others. Therefore, these are data or information already collected by other researchers or institutions usually for different purposes (Blumberg et al. 2008). Secondary data is obtained from newspapers, journals, library, government publications, institutional reports, Internet as well as from articles from past studies. Therefore, in this study, this researcher consulted the Internet, the institution's periodic reports, library, journals and articles on the subject matter as sources of secondary data which gave this researcher extensive information about the effect of stress on employee productivity. By this, I was able to place this study within the context of existing knowledge as well as broaden my understanding of the research topic (Blumberg et al. 2008).

### **5.5 Method of data collection**

As earlier stated above, data in this work was gathered or collected through questionnaires and discussions where necessary with participants. In a bid to do so, permission or authorization was obtained to conduct research in the institution's branches by submitting an application to the director general and human resources manager respectively. With this, the questionnaire was handed to the respondents and it also encourage them to fill the questionnaire without fear as the authorization for the collection of data has been granted. This authorisation was circulated through to the various branch managers within the sample area to permit their subordinates to accept and answer the questionnaire. The questionnaires were distributed by a proxy and by mail where necessary to the participants who were beseeched to give a candid and honest response to the questions. Focused discussions or exchanges with some respondents was done in order to clarify any ambiguity and confirm the answers in the questionnaire. After this, the data collected was analysed accordingly and the findings and recommendation were made thereafter.

### **5.6 Data analysis**

(Sarantakos 1998) posits that the analysis of data enables the researcher to organise the data collected so as to evaluate or assess the findings and to arrive at a reasoned and valid conclusion. This data is now

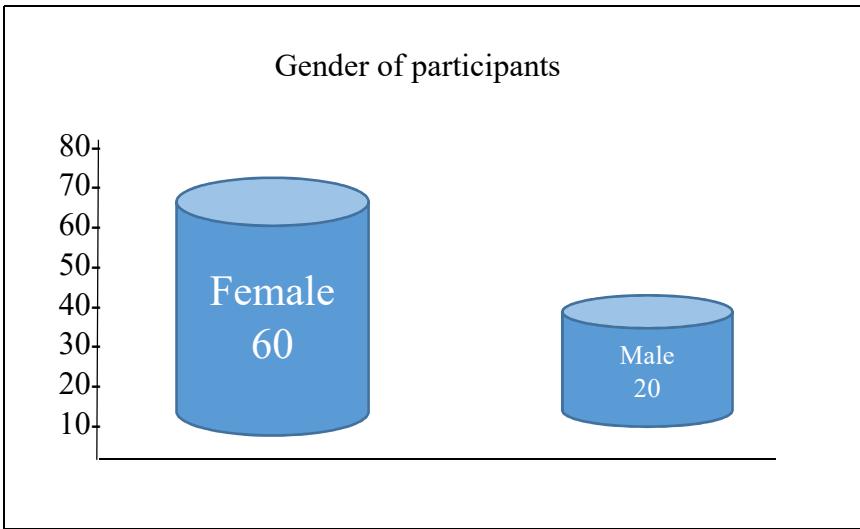
represented using Microsoft excel tools and findings presented in descriptive statistics involving tables and bar charts.

**6 RESEARCH FINDINGS AND DISCUSSION**

This chapter presents the data collected by the researcher through questionnaires and where necessary focused discussions with employees who had the time to do so. Questionnaires were given to employees of Micro Finance Institution within Yaoundé central of the Mfoundi division. Using the purposive sampling technique, a total of 80 participants were selected. They participated freely with no participant haven been coerced to offer any sort of contribution. The data so collected will be thoroughly analysed to present the results accordingly.

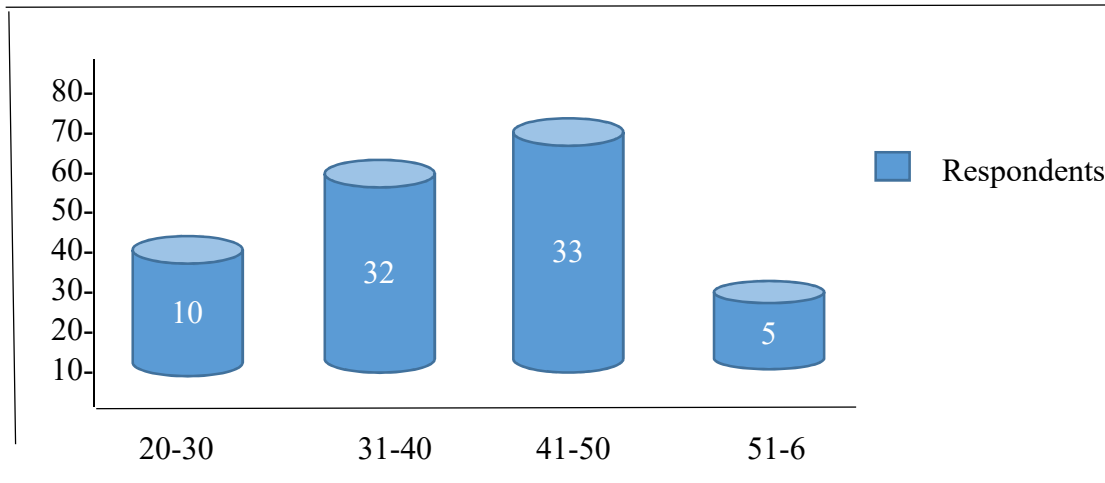
**6.1 Participants’ demographics**

Using the purposive sampling method, the researcher selected 80 participants. The demographics of these participants were as follows.



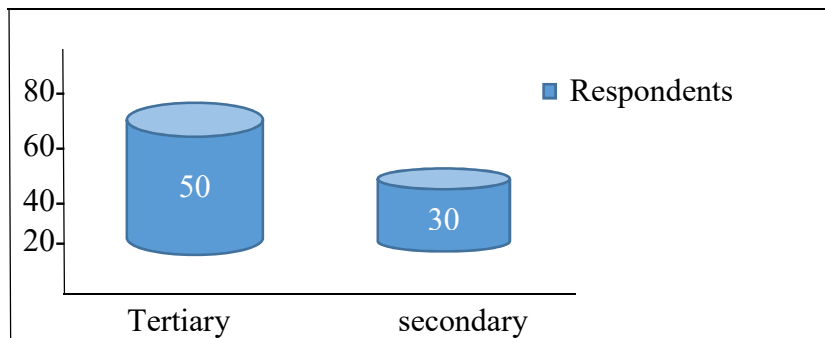
**FIGURE 1. Gender of participants**

Figure 1 above illustrates the gender of the selected participants, from the 80 participants selected, 75% of them were females and 25% were males. The data indicates there was a wide difference between the number of females and males used during this work. This therefore shows female employees were more in comparison with their male counterpart.



**FIGURE 2. Age Distribution**

From figure 2, a slight majority of the employees were from the age group of 41 to 50 years amounting to 41.25%, whilst 40% of the employees were from the age range of 31 to 30 years. The figure also portrays 12.5% were between the ages 20 to 30 years and 6.25% of the employees formed the age range of 51 to 60 years. The said micro Finance has majority of its employees within the youthful and active employment zone.



**FIGURE 3. Academic Qualification**

From figure 3, it is clearly seen that 50 of the employees representing 62.5% have attended an institution of higher learning and have certificates or diplomas. This institution of higher learning ranges from university, professional and vocational schools.

	Frequency	Percentage	Cumulative percentage
0-2years	2	2.5	2.5
3-4 years	8	10	12.5
5-6 years	20	25	37.5
7-8years	25	31.25	68.75
9-10 years	15	18.75	87.5
11+ years	10	12.5	100
Total	80	100	

**TABLE 4. How long have you been working with Micro Finance Institution?**

Table 4 above clearly shows the length or number of years these employees have worked in microfinance. 10 of them have more than 11 years of extensive working experience with microfinance. 15 have worked for 9 to 10 years while 25 have a relationship in the institution for 7-8 years. However, 20 have been working for 5-6 years and 8 for 3-4years. Just 2 have a working experience of 0-2 years. From the foregoing, it is noteworthy to acknowledge that the researcher was very selective in choosing participants who have a long working experience or who have worked with the institution for quite a long time. This is simply because those who have worked there for long can give a better assessment than those with fewer number of years' experience.

Responses	Frequency	Percentages
Yes	40	50
No	15	18.75
Sometimes	25	31.25
Total	80	100

**TABLE 5. Do you like working for the institution?**

An overwhelming 50 % of employees love their jobs and don't have reasons to quit. Surprisingly, 31.25% of the employees selected cast doubt on their relationship with the institution. They complain that there are times where the work seems so boring such much that they will prefer working elsewhere



than where they are while at same time, they enjoy what they do. 18.75 % were out right about their stay with the institution. They dislike their jobs and that they are only there because they are afraid of being unemployed. To me their act or thought simply resides in the famous parable of choosing between two devils-unemployment and work where they are dissatisfied.

Response	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	60	75
No	15	18.75
No comment	5	6.25
Total	80	100

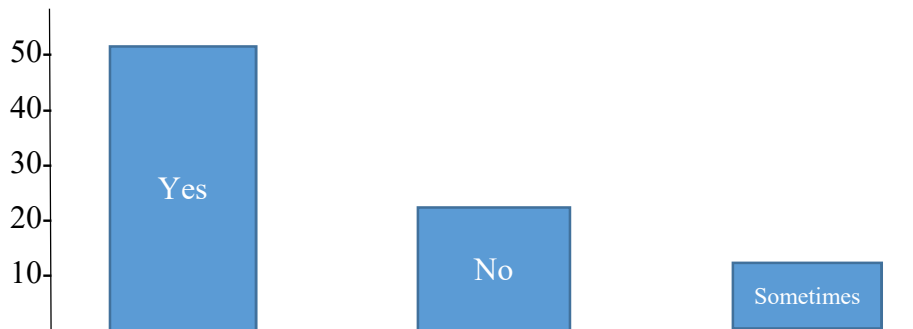
**TABLE 6. Do you work under pressure?**

As shown in the above table, 75% of employees acknowledge the presence of pressure at work. This relates to the institution's mood and when there is high demand on them to boost their productivity to meet a certain target as it is often the case towards the end and middle of the year. 18.75% report not to be working under pressure while 5% made no commentary. The researcher could easily notice that the participants who gave the last two responses were those at the level of management.

Response	Frequency	Percentage (%)	Cumulative %
Yes	50	62.5	62.5
No	10	12.5	75
Sometimes	20	25	100
Total	80	100	

**TABLE 7. Do you feel stressed when at work?**

Frequency



**FIGURE 8. Frequency of Stress at Work**

The figure above shows that 50 of the participants believed they are always stressed at work which results from pressure or high demand expected of them. 10 participants noted that they are not stressed at work while 20 indicated they are not always stressed.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage (%)
Working Hours	25	31.25
Salaries & wages	14	17.5
Growth opportunities	15	18.75
Relationship with superior	9	11.25
Work load	17	21.25
Total	80	100

**TABLE 9. Which of the following factors would you consider causes stress while at work?**

Majority of the participants rated working hours and work load as major stressors as they are required to work for longer hours with much workload. This causes a lot of stress to them as they begin work at 7:30am and the doors are shut at 5:30pm and an extra 30minutes is spent to round up the paper work or make the report of the day. This working routine is followed for six days of the week. It is important to note that, this working hour extends right up to 9pm for those branches which are required to work the

night shift. Exceptionally, there are branches that work on Sundays. Here, the working hour starts from 8am to 3pm. With these last two schedules, the management alternates the workers. This of course followed by growth opportunities and salaries.

## **6.2 What do you do when you feel tensed at work?**

The Table below illustrates the responses of the participants when they were asked what action they take when they are stressed at work. Figure 6. illustrates that majority of the participants confronts the problem or what make them tense head-on. They prefer handling their problem by themselves using their own style or method without third party interference. This is a good way of solving their problems or their tensed situation. 15% of the participants resort to alcohol when they feel tensed and they are predominantly made up of the men. From our interaction with participants, majority of them did not choose the option of using alcohol as a means of reducing work stress or tension. Hence it can therefore be inferred that 85% of the participants do no resort to alcohol to relief stress and this adds good value to Micro Finance Institution. 13.75% of them take out time to resolve their problems when they feel tensed at work by asking their superior for a day or several hours off. Some go for a smoke while others go for a walk, leisure, watch a movie or listen to music. Of these, only 5 of the 11 participants take out time to smoke to calm their stress. This is a good indication that majority of the participants are non-smokers.

Going for exercise especially after work for some participants serves as a stress reliever and easing of their nerves. 5% of the participants try to reduce their work load and hours respectively to calm their stress by pleading with a colleague who can afford to add more work to his/her schedule. This researcher observed that, some participants in some branches have establish a very good and cordially relationship among themselves which goes beyond work relationship. By this, they can look after themselves by assisting and sitting in another's stairs when one is stressed or absent without grudges as it is done voluntarily. Also, majority of the participants do not extend their tension to someone when they are stressed. Only a 5% of them they admit that they are very rude and aggressive hard on customers and their colleagues and usually occurs when they cannot control it. Blumenthal (2013, 5) posit that, stress makes an individual to be very annoyed, agitated, and aggressive. With this in a working environment will leads to a very poor relationship and conflicts among employees. But this is very minimal with employees of Micro Finance as evidence from the figure below. Only a few resorts to do none of the above.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Reduce workload/ hour	4	5
Confront the problem	35	43.75
Take it out on someone	4	5
Take out time	11	13.75
Take alcohol after work	12	15
Workout with exercise	8	10
Do none of the above	6	7.5
Total	80	100

TABLE 10. Respondent action when they feel tensed at work

### 6.3 Negative Impact of Stress on Performance

Here the researcher conducted a survey to assess the response of the participants regarding the impact of stress on their performance. From table 6, an overwhelming percentage of 68.75 of the participants have their performance negatively affected by stress. According to them, they have lots of difficulty performing well under stressful conditions. They contend that, they work in a customer service institution where the work of one employee depends on the other. When employees are stressed, they tend to make a lot of mistakes and the overall productivity is slowed down. However, they struggle their way to put in the best they can. 10% of participants shows no meaningful effect of stress on their performance while 18.75 reluctantly assert that stress does not always affect their performance like all the time.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	55	68.75
No	10	12.5
Sometimes	15	18.75
Total	80	100

TABLE 11. **Does stress have a negative impact on your performance?****6.4 How would you rate your overall performance?**

The table below sheds light on the participants' responses when they asked to analyse their job performance. From their responses, this researcher acquired that 10 participants constituted of mostly branch managers contend that they are extremely doing well in their respective jobs. 25 of them stated their job performance is good at work. 35 believed that their performance is just satisfactory while 10 were very dissatisfied with their performance.

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Poor	10	12.5
Satisfactory	35	43.75
Good	25	31.25
Excellent	10	12.5
Total	80	100

TABLE 12. **Work performance Rating****6.5 Do you think a formal stress management scheme program will improve your job performance?**

Responses	Frequency	Percentage
Yes	70	87.5
No	10	12.5
Total	80	100

TABLE 13. **Stress Management Scheme Program**

Here, the researcher intends to sample the views of the participants or their take regarding instituting a stress management program within the institution. 70 of the participants welcome such initiative as it

will go a long way to boast their productivity as well as that of the institution. They narrate that management has not instituted an effective stress management scheme, so it will be a plausible move for one to be created and fully implemented. While 10 of them were lukewarm as to the effect a stress management scheme will help or have in their performance. According to them they can still perform within or without stressful conditions. Some say they are used to it already and so the scheme will have little or no meaningful impact on their job performance.

## 7 CONCLUSION

Employees are the most valuable resource of every institution. Without competent employees, no institution can succeed to outrun its competitors. The success of the institution depends on the employees. The aim of this thesis was to study the effect of work stress on employees' performance in a microfinance institution in Cameroon. It is clear from the vast number of factors identified, reported and through the literature review, that the goal of this study was achieved. The results from the study show that the negative factors that distressed employees had a negative effect on their performance. So, for a Micro Finance Institution to be more successful, it is necessary for the employees to be stress-free for them to perform well.

There are many stress factors which the employees of this institution endure, and the enquiry proved that too much stress affected productivity negatively. (Ashfaq & Muhammad, 2013) in their hypothesis work, argued stress has a negative impact on employee performance when it reaches a certain undesired point. A majority (87.5%) of the participants held that a stress management program will help them perform their duties very well as opposed to 12.5 % who think the stress management scheme will have little impact on their performance. Whereas, Warraich (2013) emphasizes the needs by institutions to develop techniques that help employees to cope with stress.

The findings of this thesis are summarised in chapter six, and the general conclusions are framed on basis of the findings and analysis. The relevant studies reviewed, the concepts and theories articulated help to inform this research in a critical and comprehensive way. The data collected was analysed in frequency, percentages and the interpretations made were based on the analysed data. Diagrams were used to facilitate the scientific analysis of the data. In summation, the study has effectively provided the readers sufficient evidence about the impact of stress on employee performance. Excessive work-related stress is bound to adversely affect the performance of employees.

This study provides evidence which can be used to understand the importance of job stress within the microfinance industry. Considering the steam which microfinance institutions are gaining within the business environment, employees have a very difficult task, and much is expected of them. Therefore, management needs to ensure that employees are provided the best working and stress-free conditions. The following measures are therefore recommended:

The institution needs to elaborate and implement a robust and effective stress management mechanism that was found to be lacking to will help the employees perform much better. In addition, there is need for the management to introduce an Employee Assistance Program, a proactive measure which identifies and intervene on problems before they affect the employee production level. Praise and recognition are known to be positive influencers. The management needs to inculcate the habit to praise and recognized an employee for their exceptional performance through awards, merit system and other benefits or bonuses.

Clearly defined growth opportunities can help bolster employees' motivation and performance. The lack of growth opportunities de-motivates their employees and consequently affects their performance. Management also needs to consider increasing the number personnel's working in each branch. Increasing the number from what it is at the time this research was conducted will ease the workload and the number of hours at work. However, employees should not be encouraged to spend excessive overtime instead they should be allowed to go home at a reasonable time.



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