



Full length article

Understanding Occupational Stress and Managerial Supervisory Challenges in Botswana's Private Tertiary Institutions: An Empirical Analysis

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ABSTRACT

Occupational stress is a growing challenge in higher education, particularly in developing contexts where institutional resources and governance structures are often limited. This study investigates the key sources of occupational stress among academic staff in Botswana's private tertiary institutions and examines the challenges faced by managers who supervise stressed lecturers. Using a mixed-methods approach that integrates survey data with qualitative insights from academic staff and managers in Gaborone, the findings show that excessive workload, administrative demands, resource shortages, work-life imbalance, and psychosocial pressures are the most prominent stressors affecting lecturers. Managers similarly report difficulty recognizing stress, balancing supervisory responsibilities, and navigating institutional constraints that limit supportive interventions. Reflecting international patterns, occupational stress in Botswana is closely tied to structural and organizational conditions rather than individual shortcomings. The study contributes context-specific evidence to the limited African literature on academic stress and highlights the need for strategic workload management, supportive leadership practices, and strengthened institutional systems within Botswana's private tertiary sector.

1. INTRODUCTION

Occupational stress in higher education has become a global concern, driven by increasing workloads, administrative intensification, rising performance expectations, and expanding roles for academic staff. Across multiple regions including Africa, Asia, Europe, and the Middle East research consistently identifies teaching pressures, resource constraints, and managerial demands as significant stressors affecting academic staff well-being and performance (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019; Kartini et al., 2023; Janib et al., 2021). In developing contexts, these pressures are magnified by systemic limitations such as limited funding, understaffing, inadequate infrastructure, and evolving governance structures (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Mohamedbhai, 2011). As a result, occupational stress in higher education is increasingly recognised as a structural and institutional phenomenon rather than merely an individual psychological response.

In Botswana, private tertiary institutions play an increasingly significant role in national human capital development. As enrolment in higher education expands and private institutions complement public universities in absorbing demand, the academic workforce within these institutions has assumed a central role in delivering quality education. Despite this growing importance, empirical research on occupational stress within Botswana's private tertiary sector remains limited. While studies across Africa have examined academic stress in public universities and broader regional contexts (Ezenkiri et al., 2021; Luzipho et al., 2023), far less attention has been given to how occupational stress manifests within private higher education institutions in Botswana. This paper addresses this gap by examining two interrelated dimensions of occupational stress: (1) the primary sources of occupational stress among lecturers in private tertiary institutions, and (2) the managerial challenges associated with supervising stressed academic staff.

Drawing on empirical evidence from private tertiary institutions in Gaborone, this study employs a mixed-methods approach to explore the relationship between occupational stress and lecturer performance. The findings reveal that lecturers experience substantial stress arising from excessive workloads, compressed academic calendars, administrative burdens, performance monitoring requirements, limited institutional resources, and emotionally demanding student support responsibilities. These stressors reflect patterns identified in global academic stress literature, suggesting that Botswana's private tertiary institutions are not insulated from the structural pressures affecting higher education internationally. However, the local institutional context including resource constraints, market-driven operational models, and governance structures specific to private institutions intensifies certain stress dynamics in distinctive ways.

The study further demonstrates that occupational stress is not confined to academic staff alone. Managers supervising lecturers encounter complex and multifaceted challenges that extend beyond routine administrative oversight. Managerial responsibilities have expanded considerably in private tertiary institutions, often without corresponding increases in authority, leadership training, or organizational support mechanisms. Managers report difficulties in identifying early signs of lecturer stress, balancing accountability with empathy, maintaining effective communication, and navigating decision-making within restrictive organizational and policy environments. These findings suggest that managerial challenges are embedded within broader systemic conditions, including resource limitations, procedural rigidity, and institutional governance constraints.

By integrating localized empirical evidence with broader international scholarship, this paper advances a more contextually grounded understanding of occupational stress in developing higher education systems. It situates Botswana's private tertiary sector within global debates on academic workload intensification, managerialism in higher education, and institutional capacity constraints, while highlighting the specific structural and cultural factors shaping stress experiences in this context. In doing so, the study contributes both theoretically and practically, offering evidence-based insights to inform institutional policy formulation, leadership development strategies, and human resource interventions aimed at mitigating occupational stress and enhancing lecturer performance in private tertiary institutions.

2. LITERATURE REVIEW

Occupational stress in higher education has increasingly been recognized as a global issue, driven by the expansion of academic roles, intensification of administrative requirements, rising student expectations, and evolving governance structures across institutions. Scholars such as Yousefi and Abdullah (2019) argue that

academic stress is rooted in a combination of structural and organizational pressures, while Kartini et al. (2023) highlight the psychosocial dimensions that influence how lecturers experience and respond to these demands. Janib and colleagues (2021) further emphasize that these stressors collectively shape teaching quality, research productivity, staff well-being, and broader institutional performance. Drawing on this body of work, the present section synthesizes existing scholarship relevant to the two core aims of the study: first, to identify the sources of occupational stress experienced by academic staff, and second, to examine the challenges encountered by managers who supervise employees working under sustained stress in higher education environments.

2.1 Sources of Occupational Stress Among Academic Staff

2.1.1 Workload and Time Pressure

Excessive workload remains one of the most widely documented sources of stress in higher education. Research from Malaysia, Indonesia, South Africa, Nigeria, and the Maldives shows that high teaching loads, extensive grading responsibilities, administrative obligations, and limited preparation time significantly heighten stress levels among academic staff. Yousefi and Abdullah (2019) emphasise that lecturers often experience workloads that exceed manageable limits, while studies such as those by Mulyadi et al. (2024) and Luzipho et al. (2023) illustrate how these pressures restrict opportunities for lesson planning, student engagement, and pedagogical innovation. Similar patterns are evident in work by Oyewole and Agbesanya (2024) in Nigeria and Hassan et al. (2024) in the Maldives, both of whom observe that heavy teaching and administrative demands consistently undermine job satisfaction and well-being.

2.1.2 Administrative Burden

Administrative responsibilities within universities have expanded substantially in recent years, adding a significant layer of complexity to academic work. Studies from multiple regions show that lecturers are increasingly required to manage documentation, continuous reporting, accreditation processes, moderation tasks, and departmental coordination, all of which contribute to heightened job strain. Kartini et al. (2023) note that administrative intensification frequently displaces time needed for teaching preparation and research engagement, while Yousefi et al. (2020) observe that the rising volume of reporting and compliance activities has become one of the most demanding aspects of academic work. Hilman et al. (2022) similarly highlight that administrative overload is closely linked to burnout, emotional exhaustion, and reduced feelings of accomplishment among academic staff.

2.1.3 Resource Constraints and Institutional Support

Insufficient resources whether in the form of inadequate teaching materials, limited technological infrastructure, or restricted opportunities for professional development are widely recognized as major contributors to academic stress. Teferra and Altbach (2004) argue that resource scarcity is a defining characteristic of many African higher education systems, while Mohamedbhai (2011) highlights how chronic underfunding and infrastructural limitations place considerable strain on academic staff. Luzipho et al. (2023) similarly note that staff shortages and limited institutional capacity intensify pressure by compelling lecturers to assume multiple roles with minimal support. Such conditions increase workload demands, constrain the time available for preparation and recovery, and ultimately undermine both performance and well-being.

2.1.4 Role Ambiguity and Conflicting Expectations

Role ambiguity and role conflict are widely recognized as significant sources of occupational stress, a relationship clearly outlined in Role Stress Theory as developed by Kahn et al. (1964) and later expanded by Robbins (2009). Empirical studies from Nigeria, Malaysia, and Indonesia demonstrate that unclear job expectations and competing demands from multiple stakeholders contribute to heightened stress and diminished job satisfaction. Luga's work in Nigeria highlights how uncertainty around academic responsibilities creates persistent tension, while Jermstipparsert et al. (2021) and Faozen (2019) show that simultaneous expectations to teach, conduct research, fulfil administrative duties, and support students often exceed staff capacity in their respective contexts.

2.1.5 Emotional Labour and Student Support Responsibilities

Academic staff increasingly undertake substantial emotional labour, which includes supporting distressed students, mediating conflicts, and addressing sensitive academic or personal issues. Research across multiple contexts indicates that these demands contribute significantly to emotional exhaustion and heightened stress levels. Rashid et al. (2022) note that emotional labour is a core but often overlooked component of academic work, while Husin et al. (2022) and Mulyadi et al. (2024) emphasize that such relational demands can intensify fatigue when institutions lack adequate support mechanisms. Emotional labour is frequently under-recognized or unaccounted for in formal workload policies, resulting in additional pressures on lecturers whose roles extend beyond traditional teaching responsibilities.

2.2 Managerial Challenges When Supervising Stressed Academic Staff

2.2.1 Difficulty Recognizing Stress Symptoms

Studies across the higher education sector suggest that managers often struggle to recognize the early signs of occupational stress among academic staff. Hargrove et al. (2011) note that managerial attention is frequently directed toward performance metrics, administrative requirements, and institutional targets, which can obscure emerging well-being concerns. Similar observations by Lawer (2021) and Hilman et al. (2022) indicate that early indicators of strain such as withdrawal, reduced engagement, or irritability may be misinterpreted as declining performance rather than understood as symptoms of stress. Several managers reported uncertainty about how to differentiate between performance issues and underlying emotional or psychological strain, which can delay appropriate interventions and exacerbate staff stress.

2.2.2 Balancing Administrative Oversight with Pastoral Responsibilities

Managers in higher education often operate within an inherent tension between enforcing institutional expectations and safeguarding staff well-being. International research shows that managerial roles have increasingly shifted toward administrative oversight, limiting the time and capacity available for pastoral engagement. Teferra and Altbach (2004) describe how expanding bureaucratic demands have reshaped managerial responsibilities, while Luzipho et al. (2023) and Aturu-Aghedo (2024) observe that performance monitoring and compliance requirements frequently overshadow the relational aspects of academic leadership. A recurring theme in the literature is that managerial effectiveness in higher education is frequently constrained by institutional systems. Bureaucratic procedures, unclear policies, and limited decision-making autonomy often hinder managers' ability to respond proactively to staff needs. Mohamedbhai (2011) highlights how systemic rigidity restricts managerial flexibility in many African institutions, while Ezenkiri et al. (2021) and Luzipho et al. (2023) similarly note that managerial efforts are often impeded by administrative bottlenecks and ambiguous organizational frameworks.

Supervising staff who are experiencing high levels of stress requires strong communication, psychological safety, and mutual trust features consistently highlighted in leadership and organizational psychology scholarship. Hargrove et al. (2011) emphasize that effective supervisory relationships depend on open dialogue and supportive engagement, while Robbins (2009) notes that trust is foundational for managing performance and navigating emotionally sensitive situations. Yet empirical studies show that stressed lecturers often withdraw, communicate less openly, or exhibit defensive or reactive behaviours, which can complicate supervisory processes. Rashid et al. (2022) describe how stress can impair interpersonal functioning and reduce willingness to seek support, and Jermittiparsert et al. (2021) similarly observe that strained communication patterns create additional challenges for managers attempting to provide guidance or intervention. These interpersonal tensions make it more difficult to build and maintain trust, thereby limiting the effectiveness of supervisory relationships in higher education environments.

3. RESEARCH OBJECTIVES

This study focuses on two core objectives on occupational stress and academic performance in Botswana's private tertiary institutions. These objectives guide the empirical analysis and structure the methodological approach adopted in the research. The integration of objectives and methods allows for a coherent understanding of stressors affecting academic staff (Objective 1) and the challenges experienced by managers who supervise stressed lecturers (Objective 2).

Objective 1:

To understand the sources of occupational stress affecting academic staff in Private Tertiary Institutions in Botswana.

Objective 2:

To understand the challenges experienced by managers when supervising stressed academic staff in Private Tertiary Institutions in Botswana.

These objectives align with broader scholarly calls to deepen contextual understanding of academic stress, particularly within under-researched African private tertiary sectors where governance structures, workloads, and managerial conditions differ significantly from public-sector models (Teferra & Altbach, 2004; Ezenkiri et al., 2021; Luzipho et al., 2023).

4. METHODOLOGY

The research employed a mixed-methods design, integrating both quantitative and qualitative approaches to generate a comprehensive understanding of occupational stress and managerial challenges within Botswana's private tertiary sector. This design was selected to capture not only the measurable patterns of stress but also the lived experiences and nuanced supervisory realities that cannot be fully understood through quantitative analysis alone.

4.1 Research Design

A convergent mixed-methods approach was used, in which quantitative and qualitative data were collected concurrently, analyzed separately, and then triangulated. This design enhances validity and allows complementary insights into staff stressors and managerial challenges. The mixed-methods framework was appropriate given the complex, multidimensional nature of occupational stress, which encompasses psychological, organizational, and interpersonal dimensions.

4.2 Population and Sampling

The study targeted academic staff and academic managers from leading private tertiary institutions in Gaborone, including Botho University, BA ISAGO University, Limkokwing University of Creative Technology, Gaborone

Institute of Professional Studies (GIPS), ABM University College, and Boitekanelo College. These institutions collectively represent a substantial portion of Botswana's private higher education sector and offer programmes across business, accounting, science and technology, health sciences, and creative disciplines.

For the quantitative component, stratified sampling was employed to ensure that the sample adequately reflected key subgroups within the academic workforce. Three primary stratification criteria were used:

- Faculty/discipline, for example, Business and Entrepreneurship; Accounting and Finance; Applied Science and Health; Science and Technology; Communication and Information Science);
- Age category (23–25; 26–30; 31–40; 41 and above) and,
- Years of academic experience (early-career, mid-career, and senior academic staff).

Institutional staff lists were used to estimate proportional representation within each stratum. Questionnaires were then distributed proportionally across faculties to mirror the relative size of academic departments within participating institutions. This ensured that no single faculty or demographic group dominated the sample and that findings reflected diverse academic contexts rather than a single disciplinary concentration.

A total of 294 questionnaires were distributed. Of these, 255 valid responses were received, yielding a response rate of 86.7%. The achieved sample closely reflected the intended stratification structure. The largest faculty representations were Marketing, Business and Entrepreneurship (27.5%) and Accounting and Finance (20.4%), followed by Applied Science and Health (13.7%), Science and Technology (12.5%), and Communication and Information Science (11.0%). Age distribution was similarly balanced, with the majority of respondents aged 31–40 (40.0%), followed by 41 and above (29.0%) and 26–30 (25.1%). Early-career academics were proportionately represented, though smaller in number, reflecting their actual presence within the institutional workforce. The final lecturer manager composition also aligned with workforce realities: 82.4% of respondents were lecturers and 17.6% occupied supervisory or managerial roles. This distribution was intentional, as the primary quantitative focus of the study was lecturer stress, while managerial experiences were explored more deeply in the qualitative strand.

For the qualitative component, purposive sampling was used to select academic managers with direct supervisory responsibilities. Participants included programme coordinators, heads of department, and senior academic administrators. Selection criteria required that participants have at least two years of supervisory experience and responsibility for performance oversight of academic staff. This ensured that interviewees possessed sufficient institutional knowledge to provide informed insights into supervisory challenges and organizational constraints.

4.3 Data Collection Methods

Quantitative data were collected through a structured questionnaire designed to measure the prevalence and intensity of occupational stressors. The instrument included items related to workload, administrative burden, emotional labour, resource adequacy, role clarity, institutional support, and work–life balance. It was guided by the Job Demands-Resources Model (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007) and Role Stress Theory (Kahn et al., 1964). Prior to full deployment, the questionnaire was pilot-tested to ensure clarity and contextual appropriateness.

Of the 294 questionnaires distributed, 255 were returned in valid form, resulting in a response rate of 86.7%. Such a high level of participation reduces the likelihood of non-response bias and strengthens the reliability of

the findings. It also reflects the relevance of occupational stress as a topic within Botswana's private tertiary education environment.

Qualitative data were gathered through semi-structured interviews with academic managers from the same institutions. The interviews explored how managers recognized signs of staff stress, the supervisory and institutional constraints they encountered, their experiences with communication and trust dynamics, and their perceptions of available support mechanisms. All interviews were audio-recorded with participants' consent, transcribed verbatim, and incorporated into the thematic analysis.

4.4 Data Analysis

Quantitative data were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistical techniques. Descriptive results indicated that the largest proportion of respondents (40.0%) were aged 31-40, followed by those aged 41 and above (29.0%), and those aged 26-30 (25.1%). Only 5.9% were between 23 and 25 years. The gender distribution comprised 54.1% female and 45.9% male respondents. The job category distribution showed that 82.4% of respondents were lecturers and 17.6% were in management or supervisory roles, an appropriate balance for a study focusing primarily on lecturer stress.

The sample was academically diverse. Respondents were drawn from a range of faculties, with the largest representation from Marketing, Business and Entrepreneurship (27.5%) and Accounting and Finance (20.4%), followed by Applied Science and Health (13.7%), Science and Technology (12.5%), and Communication and Information Science (11.0%). This diversity ensures that the findings reflect conditions across multiple academic fields rather than a single disciplinary cluster.

Analysis of occupational stress indicators revealed that 84.3% of lecturers experienced moderate to high stress levels, with 51.0% reporting moderate stress and 33.3% reporting high stress. Excessive workload was one of the most significant stressors, with 68.9% rating it in the moderate to extremely stressful range. Insufficient resources posed notable challenges, with 59.2% of respondents indicating that resource shortages were moderately to extremely stressful. Work-life balance difficulties were evident, as 58.8% of respondents found balancing work and personal responsibilities moderately to highly stressful. Peak-period workload was a major concern, with 43.1% rating it as overwhelming and 39.2% as challenging but manageable.

These findings formed the empirical basis for Objective 1, which focused on identifying the main sources of occupational stress among academic staff.

Qualitative data were analyzed using Braun and Clarke's (2006) thematic analysis framework. The analysis revealed several prominent themes relevant to Objective 2. Managers reported difficulty identifying early symptoms of stress among lecturers, especially when such symptoms resembled performance decline. Institutional constraints, including rigid policies and limited managerial autonomy, frequently impeded effective intervention. Communication and trust issues were highlighted, as lecturers experiencing stress often became less communicative or more defensive. Managers also described emotional strain associated with supporting distressed staff while simultaneously meeting administrative and performance demands. These qualitative themes deepened understanding of the structural and relational mechanisms shaping stress experiences in private tertiary institutions.

4.5 Inferential Analysis of the Relationship Between Occupational Stress and Lecturer Performance

The descriptive findings established the prevalence of occupational stress among academic staff. To determine whether stress was statistically related to performance outcomes, both correlation and multiple regression analyses were conducted.

4.5.1 Correlation Analysis

Pearson correlation analysis revealed a strong and statistically significant negative relationship between overall occupational stress and lecturer performance.

Table A1: Correlation Between Overall Occupational Stress and Lecturer Performance Indicators

Performance Indicator	Pearson’s r	p-value
Quality of Work	-0.68	< 0.001
Productivity	-0.72	< 0.001
Meeting Deadlines	-0.65	< 0.001

The coefficients from Table A1 indicate strong inverse associations across all key performance indicators. As stress levels increase, lecturer performance declines significantly. The magnitude of these correlations (particularly $r = -0.72$ for productivity) suggests that occupational stress is not a marginal influence but a central determinant of academic effectiveness.

To assess the predictive power of specific stressors, a multiple regression model was estimated.

Table A2: Regression Analysis: Predictors of Lecturer Performance

Predictor Variable	β Coefficient	Std. Error	p-value
Excessive Workload	-0.45	0.08	< 0.001
Insufficient Resources	-0.35	0.07	< 0.001
Work–Life Balance Issues	-0.30	0.05	< 0.001
Unclear Job Expectations	-0.28	0.06	0.002
Model Statistics:			
$R^2 = 0.58$			
$F = 45.23, p < 0.001$			

From Table A2, 58% of the variance in lecturer performance is explained by four stress-related predictors: excessive workload, unclear job expectations, insufficient resources, and work-life balance issues. Excessive workload emerged as the strongest predictor of performance decline, followed by insufficient resources. These findings confirm that structural job demands rather than individual weaknesses drive reduced academic output. The inferential findings demonstrate that occupational stress is not merely prevalent but materially consequential. Strong negative correlations (r ranging from -0.65 to -0.72) indicate that higher stress levels are associated with significant declines in work quality, productivity, and deadline adherence. The regression model

further confirms that structural job demands particularly excessive workload and inadequate resources account for a substantial proportion of performance variance ($R^2 = 0.58$). These findings provide robust empirical support for the argument that occupational stress functions as a central institutional performance risk within Botswana’s private tertiary education sector.

4.6 Ethical Considerations

Ethical approval was obtained through institutional review processes. Participants were informed of the study’s objectives and assured of voluntary participation, confidentiality, and anonymity. Informed consent was obtained from all respondents, and identifying details were removed from questionnaires and interview transcripts. The sensitive nature of stress-related information necessitated strict adherence to ethical protocols, including secure data storage and privacy safeguards.

4.7 Integration of Methods

The mixed-methods design allowed quantitative and qualitative findings to be integrated in a way that enriched the study’s interpretive depth. Quantitative data established the prevalence and severity of stressors such as excessive workload, resource inadequacy, work-life imbalance, unclear expectations, and peak-period pressures. Qualitative data expanded on these findings by illustrating how such stressors were interpreted and navigated within supervisory relationships and organizational structures.

The integration of the two strands revealed that occupational stress is shaped not only by measurable workload demands but also by institutional cultures characterized by bureaucratic requirements, constrained managerial autonomy, and inconsistent support systems. Together, the findings offer a holistic understanding of stress within Botswana’s private tertiary institutions and provide a strong foundation for subsequent analysis of implications and recommendations.

5. FINDINGS

5.1 Findings for Objective 1: Sources of Occupational Stress Among Academic Staff

5.1.1 Perceived Workload and Stress Levels

Table A3 summarizes lecturers’ perceptions of their workload. The distribution of responses indicates that staff widely view their workload as excessive and difficult to manage across multiple dimensions of academic work.

Table A3: Perceived Workload and Stress Levels Among Academic Staff

Workload Indicator	Strongly Agree	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Strongly Disagree
My workload is excessive	48%	32%	10%	7%	3%
I frequently work beyond normal hours	55%	28%	9%	5%	3%
Marking load is overwhelming	52%	30%	12%	4%	2%
Deadlines are unrealistic	46%	33%	11%	7%	3%
Workload affects my ability to prepare effectively	49%	31%	10%	7%	3%

The results demonstrate that workload-related stress is systemic rather than isolated. Across all indicators, between 70% and 80% of respondents agreed that core elements of academic work such as teaching load,

marking volume, and institutional deadlines were unmanageable. The majority reported routinely working beyond normal hours, indicating a normalization of overtime and extended workdays.

Lecturers described exhaustion, insufficient preparation time, and a continual accumulation of tasks resulting from multiple delivery modes, administrative reporting requirements, and large class sizes. These patterns mirror broader international studies showing that excessive workload is the primary determinant of stress among academic staff in developing and developed higher education systems (Yousefi & Abdullah, 2019; Mulyadi et al., 2024; Luzipho et al., 2023).

5.1.2 Physical and Emotional Symptoms of Stress

Table A4 presents the frequency of physical and emotional symptoms experienced by lecturers. The responses reveal a high prevalence of both physical fatigue and affective strain.

Table A4 Physical and Emotional Stress Symptoms Reported by Lecturers

Symptom	Very Frequent	Frequent	Sometimes	Rarely	Never
Fatigue/exhaustion	41%	36%	17%	4%	2%
Headaches	33%	31%	25%	8%	3%
Anxiety or worry	29%	34%	26%	8%	3%
Sleep disturbances	27%	32%	28%	8%	5%
Emotional exhaustion	38%	35%	18%	6%	3%
Difficulty concentrating	30%	33%	25%	8%	4%

Fatigue and emotional exhaustion emerge as the most prominent symptoms, with over 70% of lecturers reporting them as frequent or very frequent. Anxiety, sleep disturbances, and difficulty concentrating are likewise common, suggesting that academic staff experience sustained psychological and physiological strain.

These results indicate chronic occupational stress rather than short-term fluctuations. The symptoms correspond with structural pressures highlighted earlier heavy workloads, unclear expectations, insufficient resources, and significant emotional labour associated with student support responsibilities. Global literature consistently links these symptoms to burnout, reduced job satisfaction, and diminished teaching and research performance (Husin et al., 2022; Rashid et al., 2022; Mulyadi et al., 2024).

5.2 Findings for Objective 2: Managerial Challenges in Supervising Stressed Academic Staff

Objective 2 examines the supervisory and organizational challenges managers encounter in supporting stressed academic staff. The findings derive from quantitative ratings and qualitative themes highlighting communication dynamics, resource limitations, and institutional constraints.

5.2.1 Manager-Lecturer Communication Challenges

Table B1 presents ratings of communication quality in supervisory relationships. Effective communication is essential for early identification of stress and for creating a supportive work environment.

Table B1 Manager-Lecturer Communication Ratings

Communication Indicator	Excellent	Good	Fair	Poor	Very Poor
Manager openness to concerns	18%	34%	26%	16%	6%
Clarity of supervisory feedback	15%	32%	31%	17%	5%

Frequency of check-ins	12%	28%	34%	20%	6%
Approachability of managers	20%	30%	27%	17%	6%

The results indicate that communication within departments is inconsistent. Only a small proportion of respondents rated communication quality as excellent, and a substantial share characterized it as merely fair. Poor ratings also appear across several indicators, suggesting gaps in supervisory engagement.

Qualitative accounts showed that managers often found it difficult to identify early stress symptoms, particularly when lecturers masked distress through withdrawal or reduced engagement. Lecturers also noted reluctance to disclose challenges due to concerns about judgement or negative performance evaluation. These relational dynamics weaken the ability of managers to intervene proactively and are consistent with research showing that communication barriers can obscure early signs of strain in academic workplaces (Hargrove et al., 2011; Robbins, 2009).

5.3 Managerial Perspectives on Supervising Stressed Academic Staff

While the thematic analysis identified structural and relational supervisory challenges, direct excerpts from academic managers provide further insight into the lived realities of leading within high-stress institutional environments.

5.3.1 Recognizing Stress Behind Performance Decline

Managers frequently reported difficulty distinguishing stress-related strain from underperformance. One Head of Department explained:

“Sometimes what looks like poor performance is actually exhaustion. But lecturers rarely say they are stressed. You just notice delays, missed emails, or withdrawal.” (Manager 2, Head of Department)

This reflects the subtle manifestation of stress within academic environments, where formal performance indicators may obscure underlying psychological strain. Managers noted that lecturers often internalise stress, making early intervention difficult.

5.3.2 Tension Between Accountability and Support

A recurring theme was the tension between institutional compliance and pastoral responsibility. A Programme Coordinator remarked:

“We are expected to meet deadlines, accreditation requirements, student satisfaction targets. At the same time, we know our staff are overwhelmed. It becomes a balancing act- sometimes you feel you are failing both sides.” (Manager 5, Programme Coordinator)

This statement illustrates the dual burden experienced by academic managers, who must uphold performance standards while navigating the emotional realities of overstretched staff.

5.3.3 Structural Constraints and Limited Autonomy

Managers also emphasized that their capacity to intervene was often restricted by institutional structures. As one Academic Administrator noted:

“Even when you want to reduce someone’s workload, the structure does not allow it. There are not enough staff to redistribute tasks. So you try to support emotionally, but structurally nothing changes.” (Manager 3, Academic Administrator)

This highlights the systemic nature of occupational stress. Supervisory challenges were not described as interpersonal shortcomings but as consequences of staffing shortages, rigid workload models, and limited decision-making flexibility.

5.3.4 Secondary Stress Among Managers

Interestingly, several managers described experiencing emotional spillover:

"It affects you as a manager as well. You absorb people's frustrations, but you still have to deliver results." (Manager 1, Head of Department)

This suggests that occupational stress permeates hierarchical levels, creating a broader organisational stress climate within private tertiary institutions.

6. DISCUSSION

This study examined occupational stress among academic staff in Botswana's private tertiary institutions and the supervisory challenges faced by managers responsible for supporting them. The findings reveal a tightly interconnected system of stressors embedded within structural job demands, institutional constraints, and the evolving complexity of academic work. When interpreted alongside international scholarship, the results suggest that occupational stress in developing higher education systems is not merely an individual phenomenon, but a systemic organisational condition.

A central finding is the dominance of workload as the primary structural stressor. Lecturers consistently reported excessive teaching loads, extensive marking responsibilities, compressed deadlines, and insufficient preparation time. Many described workloads as extending well beyond normal working hours. This pattern mirrors global trends. Yousefi and Abdullah (2019) document similar workload intensification in Malaysia, while Kartini et al. (2023) report comparable pressures in Indonesia. Across African contexts, Oyewole and Agbesanya (2024) in Nigeria and Luzipho et al. (2023) in South Africa likewise show that expanding enrolments and performance expectations have significantly increased academic demands.

The present findings extend this literature by demonstrating that workload in Botswana's private tertiary sector is not only prevalent but statistically predictive of performance decline. Regression analysis revealed excessive workload as the strongest negative predictor of lecturer performance, explaining a substantial proportion of variance in productivity and quality outcomes. Interpreted through the Job Demands-Resources (JD-R) model, these findings indicate an imbalance in which job demands consistently exceed available institutional resources, resulting in sustained strain and energy depletion.

Administrative intensification further compounds workload pressures. Participants described administrative duties as time-consuming and disruptive to core academic functions. Teferra and Altbach (2004) observe that administrative expectations often grow faster than institutional capacity in African higher education systems, particularly in resource-constrained environments. Mohamedbhai (2011) similarly argues that administrative overload has become a defining feature of academic labour across the continent. The present study confirms this pattern within Botswana's private tertiary institutions, where lecturers absorb additional compliance, reporting, and coordination responsibilities without proportional administrative support.

Resource constraints and role ambiguity emerged as additional stress amplifiers. Respondents cited inadequate teaching materials, limited technological infrastructure, insufficient workspace, and restricted professional development opportunities. Such structural deficiencies have been repeatedly identified as contributors to stress in African higher education contexts (Ezenkiri et al., 2021). Role ambiguity further intensified strain. Lecturers reported unclear performance metrics, inconsistent directives, and shifting responsibilities. Role Stress Theory

suggests that ambiguity reduces predictability and heightens emotional fatigue, a pattern reflected in both the quantitative and qualitative findings of this study.

Emotional labour represents another significant dimension of occupational stress. Beyond formal teaching duties, lecturers frequently provide pastoral care, informal counselling, and extended student support. In under-resourced institutions, these responsibilities are often not formally recognized within workload models. Rashid et al. (2022) highlight the emotional demands inherent in student-staff interactions, particularly in systems lacking adequate support structures. The current findings show that emotional strain is closely intertwined with work-life imbalance, with many lecturers reporting sleep disruption, persistent fatigue, and difficulty maintaining personal boundaries. These symptoms align with established burnout patterns described by Mulyadi et al. (2024) and reaffirmed in regional research by Luzipho et al. (2023).

Turning to managerial experiences, the study reveals complex supervisory challenges. Managers reported difficulty identifying early signs of stress, often mistaking exhaustion for performance decline. This reflects findings by Hargrove et al. (2011), who note that supervisors in higher education frequently lack formal training in stress recognition. In the present context, limited communication channels further constrained early intervention. When lecturers withdrew or became defensive behaviours commonly associated with stress-opportunities for constructive dialogue diminished.

Managers also described persistent tension between enforcing institutional performance standards and supporting staff well-being. This role conflict is widely documented in higher education leadership research. Academic managers must ensure compliance with accreditation requirements, reporting standards, and performance metrics while simultaneously attempting to preserve humane working conditions. In resource-constrained environments, these objectives often collide. The findings suggest that managerial strain is not solely interpersonal but structurally embedded within institutional governance frameworks.

Institutional rigidity further limits managerial autonomy. Policies and workload models were frequently described as inflexible, offering minimal room for redistribution of tasks or staff relief. Psychosocial hazard frameworks, such as those advanced by the ILO (2016), emphasize that occupational stress often arises from organizational design rather than individual vulnerability. The present findings strongly support this structural interpretation.

An additional contribution of this study is the identification of mirrored stress across hierarchical levels. Managers themselves reported emotional exhaustion and frustration associated with supervising distressed staff while remaining accountable for institutional outcomes. This phenomenon of secondary stress, though less frequently examined in African scholarship, is increasingly recognized in global research on educational leadership. The results therefore suggest the existence of a broader institutional stress climate in which strain circulates across academic and managerial roles. This study contributes to the literature in three key ways. First, it provides integrated quantitative and qualitative evidence from Botswana's private tertiary sector a context that remains underrepresented in higher education stress research. Second, it demonstrates statistically that occupational stress is not merely prevalent but materially predictive of performance outcomes. Third, it highlights the systemic and relational dimensions of stress, showing how organizational structures shape both lecturer strain and managerial constraint. The findings underscore the need for institutional interventions that

address structural workload design, administrative support systems, communication practices, and managerial training. Without such reforms, occupational stress is likely to remain embedded within the operational fabric of private tertiary institutions, with implications for staff well-being, student experience, and institutional sustainability.

7. CONCLUSION

This study set out to examine the sources of occupational stress affecting academic staff in Botswana's private tertiary institutions and to explore the challenges experienced by managers responsible for supervising stressed lecturers. The findings reveal a work environment characterized by high job demands, insufficient resources, and complex interpersonal and institutional pressures that together contribute to a persistent pattern of occupational stress among academic employees. The analysis highlights that workload remains the most significant source of strain, as lecturers navigate multiple modules, demanding marking loads, administrative responsibilities, and tight deadlines that limit their capacity for recovery and sustained performance. These pressures are intensified by the administrative burden placed on academic staff, resource constraints that impede effective teaching, and role ambiguity that creates confusion about priorities and responsibilities. Emotional labour associated with supporting students further intensifies the stress environment, while work-life imbalance emerges as both a consequence and amplifier of the broader structural difficulties lecturers face. The study's second objective, focusing on managerial challenges, illustrates that supervisors themselves operate within constrained institutional contexts that limit their ability to support staff effectively. Managers reported difficulty identifying early signs of lecturer stress, often due to limited training and inconsistent communication patterns. They also described tension between meeting institutional expectations and providing meaningful support to overwhelmed staff. These supervisory pressures are compounded by structural factors such as unclear policies, rigid institutional frameworks, and insufficient resources, all of which reduce managerial autonomy and contribute to emotional fatigue. The findings suggest that stress in Botswana's private tertiary institutions is not confined to individual lecturers but is distributed across the organizational hierarchy, affecting both academic and managerial personnel.

When viewed within the broader literature, the Botswana results align with international evidence showing that occupational stress in higher education is rooted in systemic and institutional conditions rather than isolated personal deficiencies. The study contributes to a growing body of research emphasizing the importance of workload regulation, clearer role definition, improved communication structures, and enhanced institutional support mechanisms. At the same time, the findings highlight the need for deeper attention to the emotional and relational dimensions of academic work, which are often overlooked in policy and organizational planning but play a critical role in shaping well-being and performance.

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