



# Work-Related Stress Experienced by Male Academics in the SADC Region: A Scoping Review

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## ABSTRACT

Work-related stress exists in various organisations around the globe and academia is no exception. Even though academics have flexible hours, they often find themselves taking work home and trying to finish their outstanding work in the evenings or weekends at the expense of their family time. Thus, this paper was aimed at synthesising the existing literature on work-related stress experienced by male academics in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. The objectives of the study were (1) to identify the key sources of work-related stress among male academics within the SADC region; (2) to provide synthesised literature on the impact of work-related stress on the mental health of male academics; and (3) to map the existing literature on coping mechanisms used by male academics to deal with their work-related stress. A scoping review guided by PRISMA-ScR was used to report on the coverage of the literature. To identify the literature, international databases (PubMed, and ScienceDirect), local database (Sabinet African Journals Online) and hand-search through Google Scholar were used. The collected data was analysed thematically using the thematic analysis by Braun and Clarke. From the databases, it emerged that there is a paucity of studies addressing academic stress with a focus on male academics within the SADC region. The limited data revealed that stress predominantly arises from role ambiguity and gender factors. Whilst, grappling with work-related stress, some academics tend to attribute blame to themselves and turn to substances or drugs to cope with their stress. From the findings, it could be deduced that academics are not immune to work-related stress regardless of their flexible working hours. The study recommends awareness campaigns on mental health issues and stress management in academia.

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## Publication History

Received 29<sup>th</sup> September, 2023

Accepted 16<sup>th</sup> November 2023

Published online:

10<sup>th</sup> January, 2024

**Keywords:** *Academia, Male Academics, Scoping Review, Work-Related Stress, SADC*

## INTRODUCTION

Academia is an environment that is concerned with teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. Based on the three aspects mentioned above, there is also an addition of administration that goes into the work. Without a doubt, that creates enormous pressure on academics and results in some of the academics experiencing stress. It is worth noting that there is no clear definition of stress but some authors have been attempting to define it in a form of a process.<sup>1</sup> Those authors indicated that stress occurs when an individual experiences some psychological challenges within the environment that they find themselves in.<sup>2</sup> However, in

<sup>1</sup> Amalia Stafyla, Georgia Kaltsidou, and Nikolaos Spyridis, *Gender Differences in Work Stress, Related to Organizational Conflicts and Organizational Constrains: An Empirical Research* (SSRN, 2014).

<sup>2</sup> Jesus Montero-Marin et al., "Coping with Stress and Types of Burnout: Explanatory Power of Different Coping Strategies," *PloS One* 9, no. 2 (2014): e89090; Natasha Khamisa et al., "Work Related Stress, Burnout, Job Satisfaction and General Health of Nurses," *International Journal of Environmental Research and Public Health* 12, no. 1 (2015): 652–66; S S Manabete et al., "Job Stress among School Administrators and Teachers in Nigerian Secondary Schools and Technical Colleges," *International Journal of Education, Learning and Development* 4, no. 2 (2016): 1–9.

this paper, stress is defined as a process wherein a male academic experiences psychological challenges in academia. The psychological challenges should affect the academic's physical well-being and also affect his quality of work or productivity.

Working conditions in academia can be demanding and complex for staff. Several authors have noticed that working conditions in academia are stressful and occupied with anxiety for most academics.<sup>3</sup> In Germany, it was reported that due to workload, the majority of professors indicated that their job is stressful.<sup>4</sup> Due to the indication that academia is stressful, Wiegel and colleagues initiated a study wherein they showed an interest in understanding what strategies are adopted by academics wherever they experience stress. In their study, they discovered that the majority of the academics were using cognitive enhancement (CE) drugs to boost their cognitive abilities.<sup>5</sup> However, their study was focused on female academics and not male academics.

Even though this paper aims to synthesise existing literature in the Southern African Development Community (SADC), there is no doubt that the prevalence of work-related stress is a global phenomenon. In showing the prevalence of work-related stress, 62% of employees have reported that they have worked on tight deadlines, while 24% of the employees indicated that they have worked more than 40 hours in Europe.<sup>6</sup> As a result of the attempt to meet deadlines, about 40% of employees have expressed some sort of stress and are overwhelmed by their work.<sup>7</sup> This goes to show that workload in the academy has the potential of providing male academics with mental challenges as they sometimes work more than 40 hours per week. In South Africa, the Employment Equity Act 55 of 1998 indicates that an employee has to complete their work within 35 hours per week.<sup>8</sup> However, that is not the case and as a result, male academics are more likely to experience burnout and not be productive, similarly to that of male nurses.<sup>9</sup> Interestingly, this issue of workplace stress transcends regional boundaries. For instance, a study by Slišković and Maslač Seršić highlighted that in Greece, female academics at the associate and assistant professorial ranks reported experiencing significant inter-professional tension. Although the genders and contexts differ, these findings collectively underscore the pervasive nature of work-related stress in academia, warranting a closer examination and an international dialogue for solutions.<sup>10</sup>

The paper is aimed at synthesising the existing literature on work-related stress experienced by male academics in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. In attaining the aim, the objectives have been formulated as:

- 1) to identify the key sources of work-related stress among male academics within the SADC region;
- 2) to provide synthesised literature on the impact of work-related stress on the mental health of male academics; and
- 3) to map the existing literature on coping mechanisms used by male academics to deal with their work-related stress.

The findings are presented in the subsequent sections.

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<sup>3</sup> George Mark and Andrew P Smith, "Effects of Occupational Stress, Job Characteristics, Coping, and Attributional Style on the Mental Health and Job Satisfaction of University Employees," *Anxiety, Stress & Coping* 25, no. 1 (2012): 63–78; Nicolene Barkhuizen, Sebastiaan Rothmann, and Fons J. R. van de Vijver, "Burnout and Work Engagement of Academics in Higher Education Institutions: Effects of Dispositional Optimism," *Stress and Health* 30, no. 4 (October 2014): 322–32, <https://doi.org/10.1002/smi.2520>; Mika Kataoka et al., "Occupational Stress and Its Related Factors among University Teachers in Japan," *Health* 2014 (2014); Constantin Wiegel et al., "Work-Related Stress and Cognitive Enhancement among University Teachers," *Anxiety, Stress, & Coping* 29, no. 1 (2016): 100–117.

<sup>4</sup> Lars Müller and Christian Schneiderberg, "The Emergence of the Organizational Academic Profession: Vertical Differentiation of German Universities and the Research-Teaching Nexus," in *Higher Education Forum*, vol. 17 (ERIC, 2020), 43–68.

<sup>5</sup> Wiegel et al., "Work-Related Stress and Cognitive Enhancement among University Teachers."

<sup>6</sup> European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions, "Eurofound: European Foundation for the Improvement of Living and Working Conditions-Eurofound," 2009.

<sup>7</sup> Isabel Rodríguez et al., "Individual, Co-Active and Collective Coping and Organizational Stress: A Longitudinal Study," *European Management Journal* 37, no. 1 (2019): 86–98.

<sup>8</sup> Andra Greeff and Pieter Nel, "Employment Transformation Enhancement in South Africa: Establishing a Job-Sharing Model to Promote Employment Equity," *South African Journal of Labour Relations* 27, no. 2 (2003): 23–62.

<sup>9</sup> Ifeyinwa O Ezenwaji et al., "Work-Related Stress, Burnout, and Related Sociodemographic Factors among Nurses: Implications for Administrators, Research, and Policy," *Medicine* 98, no. 3 (2019).

<sup>10</sup> Ana Slišković and Darja Maslač Seršić, "Work Stress among University Teachers: Gender and Position Differences," *Arhiv Za Higijenu Rada i Toksikologiju* 62, no. 4 (2011): 299–306.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

Stress is a condition that cannot be avoided, and academia is not an exception. It has been previously reported that academia is an environment that is great to work in given the flexible hours of working.<sup>11</sup> However, what was omitted was the fact that there is an unreported phenomenon being work-related stress. Much like any working environment, academics experience stresses whose sources could be traced to the environment and personal stressors.<sup>12</sup> In terms of gender difference, scholars cannot agree as to who is more affected by stress in the workplace, whereas other scholars indicate that female academics might be experiencing job stress due to extra domestic responsibilities.<sup>13</sup> In addition, another scholar indicates that male academics are the ones who experience a significant amount of stress especially when there is restructuring in the workplace.<sup>14</sup> To resolve the stalemate, Purvanova and Muros averred that work-related stress transcends gender boundaries.<sup>15</sup> Even though the stalemate was done about a decade ago, Solanki and Mandaviya resurfaced the argument and indicated that male academics are more affected by work-related stress, especially during the restructuring process (environmental stressor).<sup>16</sup> The fact that academia is still a male-dominated profession and thus male academics are given more workload as compared to their counterparts. It is against this backdrop that this study aims to systematically synthesise the existing literature on work-related stress experienced by male academics in the Southern African Development Community (SADC) region. This is because, unlike female academics, male academics when they experience stress tend to blame themselves and see substances as a way out of their misery.<sup>17</sup>

### Work-Family Conflict and its Impact on Fathers in Academia

In academia, academics have flexible hours to complete their work. However, in most instances, academics take their work home wherein they try to accomplish their work in the evening or during weekends and neglect their parental duties.<sup>18</sup> As a result, there could be a conflict that might arise in the house as the male academic does not allocate time to spend with their spouse and/or children but instead tries to complete academic activities. A systematic search found that academics are unable to strike a balance between work and family life in the United Kingdom and the United States due to workload, extensive working hours and time constraints.<sup>19</sup> As a result of the inability to strike a balance, some academics find themselves frustrated with their work and end up experiencing stress. In the United Kingdom (UK), it was established that it is no longer uncommon to find academics working on weekends instead of spending time with families.<sup>20</sup>

### Sources of Work-Related Stress

At one stage, academia was seen as an environment that provided academics with satisfying job opportunities.<sup>21</sup> However, of late, academia has turned out to be an institution that contributes significantly to occupational stress for academics.<sup>22</sup> To prove this point, a study by El Shikieri and Hassa as reported by Engle found that about 69% of the academics and support staff reported that their work was stressful and caused psychological

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<sup>11</sup> Shauna Wilton and Lynda Ross, "Flexibility, Sacrifice and Insecurity: A Canadian Study Assessing the Challenges of Balancing Work and Family in Academia," *Journal of Feminist Family Therapy* 29, no. 1–2 (January 2, 2017): 66–87, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08952833.2016.1272663>.

<sup>12</sup> Marshall Engle, "Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference to a Further Education and Training College in the Western Cape," 2012.

<sup>13</sup> Reda Abouserie, "Stress, Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction in University Academic Staff," *Educational Psychology* 16, no. 1 (March 1996): 49–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/0144341960160104>.

<sup>14</sup> Yue Liu and Bo Zhu, "Numerical Analysis and Comparison on Stress between Male and Female Academic Faculty in Chinese Universities," in *2009 Second International Conference on Information and Computing Science*, vol. 4 (IEEE, 2009), 390–93.

<sup>15</sup> Purvanova and Muros, 'Gender Differences in Burnout'.

<sup>16</sup> Sandip Solanki and Meeta Mandaviya, "Does Gender Matter? Job Stress, Work-Life Balance, Health and Job Satisfaction among University Teachers in India," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 22, no. 7 (2021): 121–34.

<sup>17</sup> M Mmako and C Schultz, "An Employee Engagement Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges in South Africa," *South African Journal of Higher Education* 30, no. 2 (June 2016), <https://doi.org/10.20853/30-2-606>.

<sup>18</sup> Wilton and Ross, "Flexibility, Sacrifice and Insecurity: A Canadian Study Assessing the Challenges of Balancing Work and Family in Academia."

<sup>19</sup> Wissam Magadley, "Moonlighting in Academia: A Study of Gender Differences in Work-Family Conflict among Academics," *Community, Work & Family* 24, no. 3 (May 27, 2021): 237–56, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13668803.2019.1678458>.

<sup>20</sup> Gail Kinman and Fiona Jones, "A Life beyond Work? Job Demands, Work-Life Balance, and Wellbeing in UK Academics," *Journal of Human Behavior in the Social Environment* 17, no. 1–2 (2008): 41–60.

<sup>21</sup> Barkhuizen, Rothmann, and van de Vijver, "Burnout and Work Engagement of Academics in Higher Education Institutions: Effects of Dispositional Optimism."

<sup>22</sup> Engle, "Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference..."

distress.<sup>23</sup> To comprehensively grasp work-related stress in academia, it is crucial to delineate its sources, which can be categorised into environmental and personal stressors.

### ***The Environment as a Source of Work-Related Stress***

When talking about environmental factors, these are external factors that cause stress among male academics such as the change in workplace facilities or environment and organisational requirements.<sup>24</sup> In 2014, Mkumbo conducted a study in Tanzania to establish the environment as a source of work-related stress and found that the majority of male academics in public universities indicated that if they were allowed to choose a different career path, they would have done so.<sup>25</sup> Those male academics were considering changing their career path because 75% of them experienced physiological stress.<sup>26</sup> The symptoms of physiological stress are reported as headache, fatigue and heart palpitations. Given that stress is unavoidable, male academics in private institutions also experience work-related stress. However, to Mkumbo male academics in private universities have lower physiological stress levels.<sup>27</sup> The proportions or difference in the experience of stress level can be positioned to the availability of resources in the private sector. This line of thinking is perpetuated by the views shared by Engle who reported that one of the factors contributing to work-related stress is lack of resources.<sup>28</sup> Again, when the environment demands more than the available resources, it increases the stress experienced by academics.<sup>29</sup> This is stressful as the academics are required to produce outputs regardless of the support that they receive, or lack thereof. One of the reasons for not receiving support is that some of the employees are in constant conflict with the management and that sees them being overburdened with work and not receiving social support. Thus, in some European and American countries, lack of resources has been flagged as the source of stress for most academics.<sup>30</sup>

Another factor contributing to work-related stress among academics is the restructuring of universities. When restructuring occurs there are some casualties such as retrenchments and budget cuts. To support this view, it has been found that during the restructuring process, some academics experience stress due to job insecurity, financial challenges, and an increase in job demand.<sup>31</sup> For instance, if one academic was responsible for one department, with the restructuring the individual might be called upon to head two or more departments with budget cuts and no incentive on his salary for the additional responsibilities. As a result, Engle reported that in South Africa, the individual will resort to working extra hours to do the job of two or more academics and also lack support.<sup>32</sup> This view was upheld by Winefield and Veale who conducted their study two decades ago and still reported that in Australia due to the restructuring, academics receive too much workload, have an unbalanced student/lecturer ratio, and are fearful to raise their concerns as they do not want to lose employment.<sup>33</sup> Due to the long hours being put in by academics to ensure that the job gets done, academics pose physical ill-health challenges and set themselves up for burnout.<sup>34</sup>

### ***Personal Factors as a Source of Work-related Stress***

Personal factors are sources of work-related stress that are manifesting internally, and the individual is unlikely to speak about them. The tolerance of role ambiguity, divorce, and personality type are some of the factors that make academics experience work-related stress.<sup>35</sup> For instance, if an academic is divorced, s/he will remain in a toxic job because s/he has no other person who can support him or her financially. Again, there are those individuals who are unable to express themselves as it is their personality, and they end up bottling up the stress that they receive at work due to unclear role division.

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<sup>23</sup> Engle, "Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference..."

<sup>24</sup> Engle, "Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference..."

<sup>25</sup> Kitila Mkumbo, "Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Work Stress in Academia in Tanzania.," *International Journal of Higher Education* 3, no. 1 (2014): 1–11.

<sup>26</sup> Mkumbo, "Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Work Stress in Academia in Tanzania."

<sup>27</sup> Mkumbo, "Prevalence of and Factors Associated with Work Stress in Academia in Tanzania."

<sup>28</sup> Engle, 'Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference to a Further Education and Training College in the Western Cape'.

<sup>29</sup> Peter Warr, *Psychology at Work* (Penguin UK, 2002).

<sup>30</sup> Engle, 'Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference...'

<sup>31</sup> N. A. Gillespie et al., "Occupational Stress in Universities: Staff Perceptions of the Causes, Consequences and Moderators of Stress," *Work & Stress* 15, no. 1 (January 2001): 53–72, <https://doi.org/10.1080/02678370117944>.

<sup>32</sup> Engle, 'Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference...'

<sup>33</sup> Helen R. Winefield and Bronwyn M. Veale, "Work Stress and Quality of Work Performance in Australian General Practitioners," *Australian Journal of Primary Health* 8, no. 2 (2002): 59–65.

<sup>34</sup> Gunilla Krantz, Leeni Berntsson, and Ulf Lundberg, "Total Workload, Work Stress and Perceived Symptoms in Swedish Male and Female White-Collar Employees," *The European Journal of Public Health* 15, no. 2 (2005): 209–14.

<sup>35</sup> Engle, "Occupational Stress amongst Lecturers with Specific Reference..."

### **Coping Mechanisms used by Academics when in Distress**

To show that academics are experiencing stress, more often than not, they resort to absenteeism and substance abuse.<sup>36</sup> Whereas other academics use substances to cope with work-related stress, others resort to working in other institutions and cause the institution to fail in their quest to retain good lecturers. Due to academic stress, the retention of lecturers is a challenge as some lecturers leave public learning institutions to take up positions in the private sector.<sup>37</sup> Wedekind and Buthelezi position the blame on management for the stress experienced by academics.<sup>38</sup> In their work, they found that those in leadership do not have a good relationship with academics and that is seen in the quality of work that academics bring in the academia.

### **Nexus of Male and Female Academics on Work-Related Stress**

Scholars cannot seem to agree on the issue of work-related stress across different genders. For instance, some scholars are all in agreement that female academics experience more stress as compared to male academics.<sup>39</sup> However, Liu and Zhu disputed the above authors and indicated that male academics experience more stress as compared to female academics.<sup>40</sup> In trying to side with Liu and Zhu, Archibong and colleagues indicated that the reason male academics are said to experience less stress might be due to the way they perceive stress at work.<sup>41</sup> For instance, female academics are more prone to domestic stress whereas male academics are more prone to workload, especially in Africa.<sup>42</sup> However, Purvanova and Muros hold a different view as they indicated that work-related stress knows no bounds as both male and female academics experience work-related stress equally.<sup>43</sup>

The reason that some authors believe that males experience more stress as compared to females might be that academia is still a largely male-dominated profession.<sup>44</sup> Female academics experience work-related stress as they have to deal with a high workload and still perform other duties such as caring for children at home.<sup>45</sup> On that score, it means that women have to put in more hours at work and still put more effort into fulfilling their family responsibilities after hours which poses a threat to their health. However, Solanki and Mandaviya did not agree with Barkhuizen and Rothmann's justification of why female academics are said to be experiencing less work stress as compared to their counterparts.<sup>46</sup> The study findings of Solanki and Mandaviya established that male academics received more workload and had to perform multiple tasks at the workplace as compared to their counterpart.<sup>47</sup> As a result, it has been reported that taking part in multiple tasks and roles at the workplace contributes to the ill health of male academics.

### **METHODOLOGY**

This scoping review followed the PRISMA-ScR (see Figure 1) guidelines.<sup>48</sup> The researcher chose a scoping review to rapidly map the existing literature on work-related stress.<sup>49</sup> To identify the relevant studies, the researcher relied on international databases (PubMed and ScienceDirect) and local databases (Sabinet African Journals Online). Articles from the databases were exported to the reference manager, Zotero, for handling. To

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<sup>36</sup> Warr, *Psychology at Work*.

<sup>37</sup> Mmako and Schultz, "An Employee Engagement Framework for Technical Vocational Education and Training Colleges in South Africa."

<sup>38</sup> Volker Wedekind, Adrienne Watson, and Zanele Buthelezi, "Lecturers in Distress: Fractured Professional Identity amongst TVET College Staff in South Africa," *SAQA BULLETIN* 15 (2016): 117–42.

<sup>39</sup> Abouserie, "Stress, Coping Strategies and Job Satisfaction in University Academic Staff."

<sup>40</sup> Liu and Zhu, "Numerical Analysis and Comparison on Stress between Male and Female Academic Faculty in Chinese Universities."

<sup>41</sup> Ijeoma Aniedi Archibong, Akpo Offiong Bassey, and David Otu Effiom, "Occupational Stress Sources among University Academic Staff," *European Journal of Educational Studies* 2, no. 3 (2010): 217–25.

<sup>42</sup> Archibong, Bassey, and Effiom, "Occupational Stress Sources among University Academic Staff."

<sup>43</sup> Radostina K Purvanova and John P Muros, "Gender Differences in Burnout: A Meta-Analysis," *Journal of Vocational Behavior* 77, no. 2 (2010): 168–85.

<sup>44</sup> Nicolene Barkhuizen and Sebastiaan Rothmann, "Occupational Stress of Academic Staff in South African Higher Education Institutions," *South African Journal of Psychology* 38, no. 2 (2008): 321–36.

<sup>45</sup> Barkhuizen, Rothmann, and van de Vijver, "Burnout and Work Engagement of Academics in Higher Education Institutions: Effects of Dispositional Optimism."

<sup>46</sup> Solanki and Mandaviya, "Does Gender Matter? Job Stress, Work-Life Balance, Health and Job Satisfaction among University Teachers in India."

<sup>47</sup> Solanki and Mandaviya, "Does Gender Matter? Job Stress, Work-Life Balance, Health and Job Satisfaction among University Teachers in India."

<sup>48</sup> Alessandro Liberati, "The PRISMA Statement for Reporting Systematic Reviews and Meta-Analyses of Studies That Evaluate Health Care Interventions: Explanation and Elaboration," *Annals of Internal Medicine* 151, no. 4 (August 18, 2009): W, <https://doi.org/10.7326/0003-4819-151-4-200908180-00136>.

<sup>49</sup> Hilary Arksey and Lisa O'Malley, "Scoping Studies: Towards a Methodological Framework," *International Journal of Social Research Methodology* 8, no. 1 (February 2005): 19–32, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1364557032000119616>.

assess their eligibility, the researcher relied on the following inclusion criteria; articles which were about male academics, studies conducted within SADC, and primary research papers (trials, qualitative, quantitative, pilot studies, and observational studies) published within 2013-2023. The search strategy was not limited to any language. The eligibility screening was done by the researcher aided by the research assistant (KM). Eligible articles were placed on the data chart (see Table 1). The collected data was analysed thematically using thematic analysis.<sup>50</sup>

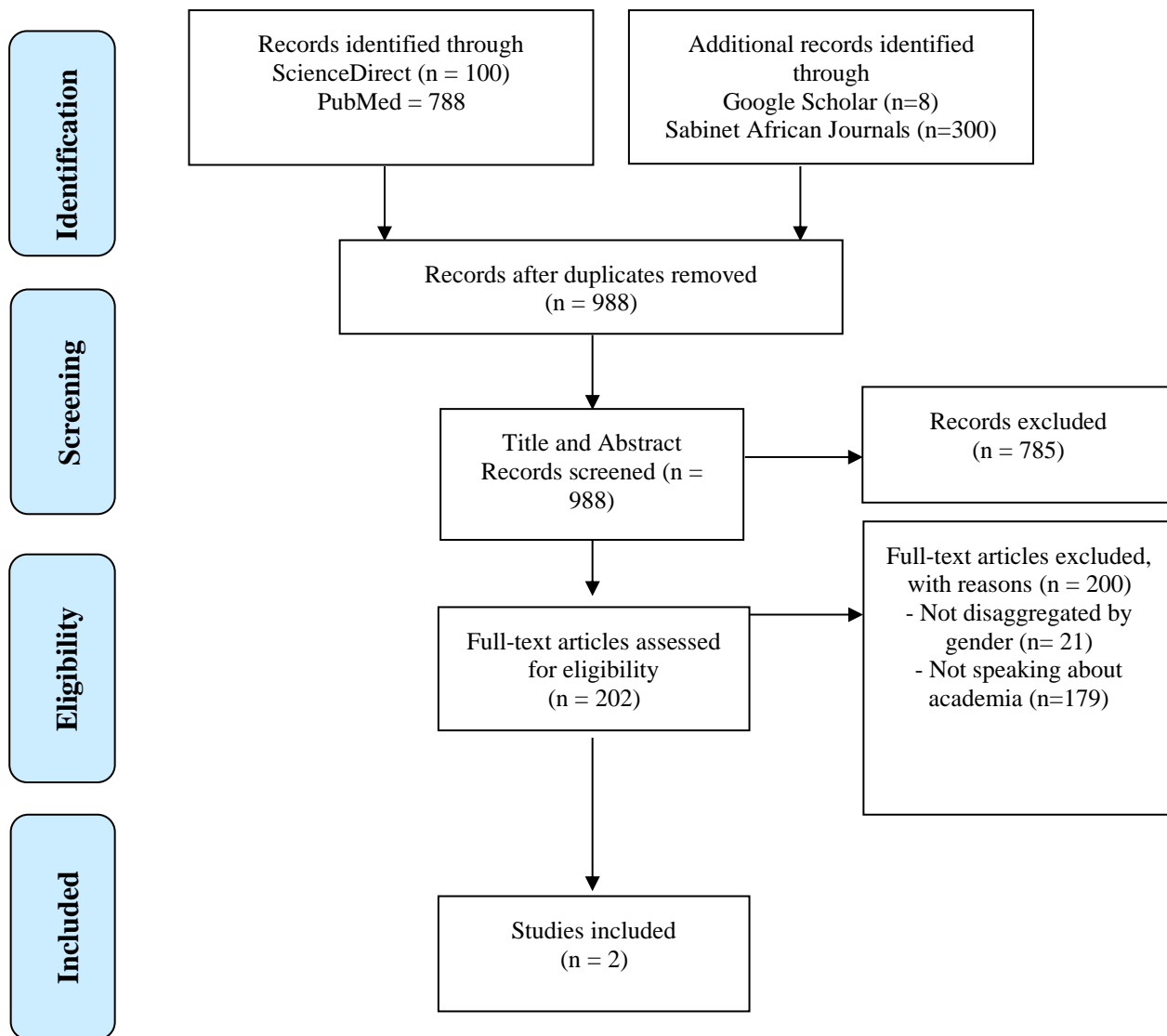


Figure 1. Flow chart of study selection

<sup>50</sup> Victoria Clarke and Virginia Braun, ‘Teaching Thematic Analysis: Overcoming Challenges and Developing Strategies for Effective Learning Victoria Clarke & Virgini’, *The Psychologist* 26, no. 2 (2013): 120–23.

## RESULTS

Table 1. Data charting

Authors and year	Title	Location	Research design	Population	Main findings
Kabito Gebisa, Wami Sintayehu, Chercos Daniel, Mekonnen Tesfaye.  2020	Work-related Stress and Associated Factors among Academic Staff at the University of Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia: An Institution-based Cross-sectional Study.	Ethiopia	Cross-sectional design	381 (male) and 109 (female) lecturers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority (59.9%) of the male lecturers have expressed that they experience stress at the workplace</li> <li>The study showcased that work experience, gender and role ambiguity were factors contributing to work-related stress among academics;</li> <li>Participants preferred smoking cigarettes as a coping mechanism whereas other participants pointed out the cigarette as the cause of stress.</li> </ul>
Chukwuemeka, U. M., Okonkwo, U. P., Njoku, C. J., Igwe, S. E., Oyewumi, T. J., & Ugwuanyi, D. C. (2023).	Work-related stress, quality of life, and coping mechanism among lecturers in a Tertiary Educational Institution in Anambra State, Nigeria.	Nigeria	A randomised trial	283 academics (119 male) and (164 females)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Majority of the participants confirmed that they have experienced work-related stress;</li> <li>Male lecturers were more likely to use substances to deal with their work-related stress as compared to females;</li> <li>When experiencing stress, some of the lecturers indicated that they make use of emotional support;</li> <li>Male lecturers often blame themselves for experiencing stress at the workplace;</li> <li>It is indicated that work-related stress does not depend on the gender.</li> </ul>

There is a paucity of studies addressing academic stress with a focus on male academics within the SADC region. Only two studies have presented disaggregated findings on work-related stress among male academics.<sup>51</sup> These studies, which reported disaggregated results, were conducted exclusively in Ethiopia and Nigeria, employing cross-sectional and randomised trial designs, respectively.<sup>52</sup>

<sup>51</sup> Gebisa Guyasa Kabito et al., "Work-Related Stress and Associated Factors among Academic Staffs at the University of Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia: An Institutionbased Cross-Sectional Study," *Ethiopian Journal of Health Sciences* 30, no. 2 (2020); Uchechukwu Martha Chukwuemeka et al., "Work-Related Stress, Quality of Life, and Coping Mechanism among Lecturers in a Tertiary Educational Institution in Anambra State, Nigeria," *BMC Psychology* 11, no. 1 (March 16, 2023): 73, <https://doi.org/10.1186/s40359-023-01114-5>.

<sup>52</sup> Kabito et al., "Work-Related Stress and Associated Factors among Academic Staffs at the University of Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia: An Institutionbased Cross-Sectional Study"; Chukwuemeka et al., "Work-Related Stress, Quality of Life, and Coping Mechanism among Lecturers in a Tertiary Educational Institution in Anambra State, Nigeria."

According to the primary findings, Chukwuemeka and colleagues asserted that work-related stress is not influenced by gender,<sup>53</sup> while Kabito and colleagues highlighted that stress predominantly arises from role ambiguity and gender factors.<sup>54</sup> Nevertheless, it is evident that academics do encounter work-related stress. When grappling with work-related stress, some academics tend to attribute blame to themselves.<sup>55</sup> Amid these challenges, academics turn to substance use as a coping mechanism, while others seek emotional support.

## DISCUSSION

The undeniable reality is that teaching is a demanding profession and academics are not exempt from this narrative.<sup>56</sup> Academia imposes substantial pressure on academics, potentially detrimentally impacting their mental health. Academics find themselves tasked with teaching and learning, research, and community engagement. In the realm of teaching, educators must adapt to the challenges of the fourth industrial revolution and ensure they deliver quality education to students. However, at times, technology may prove to be less user-friendly and management has introduced a system whereby students must assess the lecturer, a factor later considered during promotion assessments.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, the pursuit of satisfying learners can become so stressful that studies have found academics experiencing depression and contemplating leaving the profession.<sup>58</sup>

Academics must stay abreast of the latest developments in research, a demand coupled with the age-old adage "publish or perish"<sup>59</sup> and trying to ensure that performance appraisal goals are accomplished. As a result, Kinman noted that academics develop institutional pressure and the situation is worsened when those in leadership adjust appraisal methods and include that academics have to maintain a high productivity with fewer resources.<sup>60</sup> Additionally, even when academics produce research outputs in the form of publications, they remain under constant scrutiny by journal reviewers. Some academics invest extra hours, which often go unrecognised by management.<sup>61</sup> This practice is detrimental to the psychological well-being of academics. Some academics put considerable effort into their work, aiming to meet their performance appraisal goals at the end of the year with a lack of resources. Whilst not having sufficient resources, academics often do not have clear roles which exacerbate their mental challenges.<sup>62</sup>

Research conducted in Ethiopia found that academic stress was more prevalent in males as compared to females.<sup>63</sup> The results indicate that male academics make use of two coping strategies, emotional support and substance use when experiencing work-related stress. In terms of support, a study conducted in Malaysia has indicated that support in the workplace reduces the stress experienced by academicians.<sup>64</sup> Moreover, Verhoeven and colleagues also summarised that receiving insufficient support affects human life as it has a dire impact on the individual's mental health.<sup>65</sup> As a way of making amends and getting to cope with their work-related stress,

<sup>53</sup> Chukwuemeka et al., "Work-Related Stress, Quality of Life, and Coping Mechanism among Lecturers in a Tertiary Educational Institution in Anambra State, Nigeria."

<sup>54</sup> Kabito et al., "Work-Related Stress and Associated Factors among Academic Staffs at the University of Gondar, Northwest Ethiopia: An Institutionbased Cross-Sectional Study."

<sup>55</sup> Chukwuemeka et al., "Work-Related Stress, Quality of Life, and Coping Mechanism among Lecturers in a Tertiary Educational Institution in Anambra State, Nigeria."

<sup>56</sup> Sandra Ingried Asaloei, Agustinus Kia Wolomasi, and Basilius Redan Werang, "Work-Related Stress and Performance among Primary School Teachers.," *International Journal of Evaluation and Research in Education* 9, no. 2 (2020): 352–58.

<sup>57</sup> Gail Kinman, "Doing More with Less? Work and Wellbeing in Academics," *Somatechnics* 4, no. 2 (2014): 219–35.

<sup>58</sup> Fernando Doménech Betoret, "Stressors, Self-efficacy, Coping Resources, and Burnout among Secondary School Teachers in Spain," *Educational Psychology* 26, no. 4 (2006): 519–39.

<sup>59</sup> Seema Rawat and Sanjay Meena, "Publish or Perish: Where Are We Heading?," *Journal of Research in Medical Sciences: The Official Journal of Isfahan University of Medical Sciences* 19, no. 2 (2014): 87.

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<sup>64</sup> Khairunesa Isa and Sarala Thulasi Palpanadan, "Prevalence Causes of Stress and Coping Strategies among Malaysian University Lecturers.," *International Journal of Higher Education* 9, no. 5 (2020): 312–21.

<sup>65</sup> Chris Verhoeven et al., "The Job Demand-Control-Social Support Model and Wellness/Health Outcomes: A European Study," *Psychology and Health* 18, no. 4 (2003): 421–40.

some male academics indulge in substance use.<sup>66</sup> On the other hand, some male academics rely on exercises in order to cope with their work-related stress.<sup>67</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Given the dearth of literature in the SADC region, the researcher recommends exploration studies on work-related stress experienced by academics to implement new policies. These studies should provide a multi-dimensional analysis, emphasising the cultural, economic, and institutional stressors unique to the region. With robust data, institutional policies can be tailored to address specific stress factors, involving academic staff in their development to ensure practicality and relevance. Upon the introduction and implementation of these policies, it is crucial for management to advocate for their active enforcement and to facilitate training for clear role guidance, which is essential in preventing work-related stress. Regular workshops and seminars focusing on role definition, time management, and stress reduction should become part of the institutional culture. Moreover, for those who resort to substance use as a coping mechanism, a strengthened Employment and Wellness or Employee Assistance Programme (EAP) office within academia is recommended to offer psychosocial support. These services should include counselling, recovery support, stress management, and a confidential hotline for immediate assistance. Institutions without an EAP should prioritise establishing such a programme, recognising its potential in fostering a supportive community and enhancing individual coping strategies.

These programmes must also promote work-life balance through lessons and incentives for academics to take leave and engage in family time. The concept of 'mental health days' should be normalised, allowing for necessary breaks without stigma. In addition, initiating awareness campaigns within academia to de-stigmatise seeking help for stress and substance use is imperative. Such campaigns can cultivate an environment of openness, encouraging male academics to engage in self-care practices openly and without fear of judgment or professional harm. In sum, a comprehensive approach that includes policy development, management advocacy, psychosocial support enhancement, and cultural change is necessary to mitigate the effects of work-related stress on male academics in the SADC region. Only through such concerted efforts can a healthier, more productive academic environment be realised, where self-care is regarded not just as a personal responsibility, but as an institutional priority.

## CONCLUSION

This paper has underscored the pervasive nature of work-related stress, affirming that it is a global phenomenon transcending geographic and gender boundaries. Through rigorous examination, the researcher has met the paper's objectives, conclusively determining that the origins of work-related stress among academics stem from role ambiguity, the scarcity of resources, and the demands of working beyond traditional hours. These factors collectively contribute to a destabilised work-life balance and heightened stress levels. The researcher's investigation into the ramifications of work-related stress on mental health, while hampered by a scarcity of in-depth studies in the SADC region, nonetheless unearthed alarming trends. The limited literature indicates that male academics are particularly vulnerable to the pressures of reconciling professional responsibilities with familial obligations, often at the expense of personal time and relationships. This imbalance has significant implications, as it affects the individuals, their families, and the academic community at large. The manifestations of stress were observed to extend beyond the workplace, with some academics resorting to substance use as a coping mechanism to maintain cognitive performance and manage stress.

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### **ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS**

I would like to acknowledge the work of Ms Katlego Rantho who has helped me in screening articles of the papers. Again, I acknowledge Dr Curwyn Mapaling for assisting in conceptualising the paper and helping with proofreading the manuscript.

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