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Psychological Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Public University Library Staff in South-South Nigeria

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Abstract

This study explores the psychological impact of fuel subsidy removal on library staff in public universities within Nigeria's South-South region. The study was guided by three objectives and research questions. A descriptive survey design was adopted with a population of 223 librarians from South-South Public Universities in South-South, Nigeria. Mean Sores were used to analyse the data collected. The findings amongst others revealed that majority of librarians experienced increased financial stress and mental health challenges such as anxiety and inability to perform maximally due to the removal of fuel subsidies. The study recommends the critical need for targeted mental health interventions, such as counseling and stress management programs, alongside economic policy adjustments to mitigate the adverse effects of subsidy removal.

Keywords: psychological, fuel subsidy, Public University and Librarians

Introduction

The psychological well-being of individuals is often intricately connected to the economic and societal changes occurring around them. The Nigerian economy has witnessed significant transformations in recent years, with various policy shifts and reforms aimed at addressing fiscal challenges and achieving sustainable development. One of the most contentious policy changes in this context was the removal of fuel subsidies. This decision, while intended to promote economic growth and reduce government expenditure, has generated widespread debate and sparked multifaceted consequences across various sectors of society. Among the myriad of impacts, one often overlooked aspect is the psychological toll borne by individuals who form the backbone of essential public services, such as university librarians.

Psychological well-being refers to an individual's ability to function effectively and feel good in their daily life. It encompasses aspects such as emotional resilience, positive self-concept, and the capacity to manage stress. Anxiety and depression, common psychological challenges, can significantly disrupt this balance. These conditions are particularly relevant when considering the impact of economic stressors like fuel subsidy removal, which exacerbates financial insecurity and emotional strain among affected individuals (Harring et al., 2023; Ekong & Akpan, 2014).

Anxiety, a common reaction to stress, involves excessive worry, fear, and tension. Among public university librarians, the removal of fuel subsidies may induce anxiety due to increased financial demands, rising transportation costs, and concerns about meeting basic needs. Chronic anxiety can lead to physical symptoms such as restlessness, fatigue, and sleep disturbances, which may impair workplace productivity and overall quality of life (Babatunde et al., 2023; Heger et al., 2019). Studies suggest that uncertainty surrounding policy changes, like subsidy removal, can heighten anxiety levels, particularly in middle- to low-income populations.

Depression, often comorbid with anxiety, manifests as persistent sadness, lack of interest in activities, and feelings of helplessness. Fuel subsidy removal exacerbates depression by diminishing financial security and reducing disposable income. Librarians in public universities, already contending with systemic challenges like irregular funding and workload pressures, may experience worsened mental health due to these added economic stressors. Prolonged exposure to these challenges without effective coping mechanisms can lead to clinical depression, adversely affecting individuals' psychological well-being and job performance (Ikenga & Oluka, 2023; Chiluwa, 2015).

Statement of the Problem

The removal of fuel subsidy in Nigeria, while aimed at improving the nation's economic trajectory, has triggered significant socio-economic ripple effects among professionals including those in public university libraries in South-South Nigeria. These staff members, who often operate within constrained institutional budgets and face limited personal economic buffers, are now grappling with heightened transportation costs, inflationary pressures on goods and services, and an overall increase in the cost of living. This sudden financial burden may precipitate psychological stress, anxiety, depression, and diminished job satisfaction, potentially impairing their work efficiency and overall mental well-being. Despite the centrality of library personnel in the academic ecosystem, their unique psychological experiences during this economic policy shift remain under-researched.

This research paper seeks to shed light on the psychological impact of fuel subsidy removal specifically on the dedicated individuals working within the public university library system in Nigeria's South-South region. It will delve into their unique challenges, anxieties, and coping mechanisms, as well as the broader implications of their experiences on the quality of education and research in this vital sector. By examining the human dimension of economic policy changes, this study aims to provide insights that can inform policy-makers, university administrators, and stakeholders about the often-hidden costs of such decisions. Furthermore, it underscores the importance of safeguarding the mental well-being of those who contribute significantly to the nation's academic and intellectual advancement.

Objectives of the Study:

The following objectives guided the study

1. To assess the impact of fuel subsidy removal on librarians' stress levels.
2. To evaluate the influence of fuel subsidy removal on job satisfaction.
3. To identify coping mechanisms librarians can adopt in response to the removal of fuel subsidies.

Research Questions:

The following research questions were formulated to guide the study:

1. How has the removal of fuel subsidy affected your stress levels?
2. How has the removal of fuel subsidy influenced your job satisfaction?
3. What are the coping mechanisms you can adopt in response to the removal of fuel subsidies?

Literature Review

Studies reveal that the removal of fuel subsidies significantly impacts household finances, transportation costs, and overall quality of life, creating psychological stress, especially among low- to middle-income groups like public university staff. These stressors often manifest in reduced job satisfaction and productivity (Harring et al., 2023; Babatunde et al., 2023). Fuel subsidy removal increases transportation and living costs for staff, reducing disposable income and worsening financial stress. This financial strain directly correlates with heightened anxiety and emotional distress (Ikenga & Oluka, 2023; Evans, 2022).

The cascading economic challenges from increased fuel prices have been linked to a rise in depression, anxiety, and stress among public-sector workers, including university staff (Heger et al., 2019). The cumulative stress often exacerbates pre-existing mental health issues. Public university staff, particularly library workers, report greater challenges in commuting to work, reduced energy levels, and difficulty maintaining morale. This situation is exacerbated by the rising cost of basic goods and reduced government funding for educational institutions (Ekong & Akpan, 2014; Iheukwumere et al., 2020). The removal of fuel subsidies has been linked to heightened anxiety levels in affected populations, primarily due to its direct economic impact. According to Ogundipe et al. (2021), subsidy removal often leads to increased fuel prices, which cascade into rising costs of goods and services. This economic pressure exacerbates financial stress among households, particularly in low-income settings. Anxiety in this context stems from uncertainty about meeting basic needs, as well as fears of further economic instability. Ogundipe and colleagues highlight that anxiety levels are disproportionately higher in urban areas, where reliance on fuel-based transportation is significant.

Moreover, studies like those by Ibrahim and Adamu (2020) examine the psychological effects of policy decisions, noting that abrupt changes in fuel pricing can disrupt societal equilibrium. The removal of subsidies often triggers public protests, job losses, and transportation challenges, all of which intensify collective anxiety. Ibrahim and Adamu's research emphasizes the role of media narratives in shaping public perceptions and amplifying fears. In scenarios where government communication is insufficient, misinformation tends to spread, escalating anxiety and mistrust in leadership. This underscores the importance of transparent policy frameworks in mitigating psychological distress.

Lastly, a comparative analysis by Uzochukwu et al. (2022) identifies coping mechanisms employed by communities facing subsidy removal. Their findings reveal that social support networks and adaptive behaviors, such as carpooling and reliance on alternative energy sources, can buffer the psychological impacts. However, Uzochukwu et al. also warn that such coping strategies are not uniformly accessible, leaving vulnerable groups at a higher risk of sustained anxiety. The study calls for mental health interventions and policy cushioning measures to address the psychosocial fallout from such economic reforms, emphasizing that anxiety linked to fuel subsidy removal is both an economic and public health concern.

The removal of fuel subsidies has been identified as a significant stressor contributing to depression, particularly among economically vulnerable populations. According to Afolabi et al. (2021), the resulting increase in fuel prices leads to inflation and a reduced standard of living, which are key risk factors for depression. Afolabi's study highlights that individuals in low-income households are more likely to experience depressive symptoms due to the financial strain of meeting daily needs, such as transportation, food, and healthcare. The psychological burden of these economic pressures often manifests as feelings of helplessness and hopelessness.

In addition, Suleiman and Okonkwo (2020) investigate the societal impacts of subsidy removal, focusing on its role in triggering depressive episodes. Their findings show that sudden economic changes, such as job losses and reduced purchasing power, often result in a decline in mental health. Suleiman and Okonkwo also point out that the uncertainty surrounding future fuel prices exacerbates depressive tendencies, especially among those with preexisting mental health conditions. The study emphasizes that the intersection of economic policy and mental health is rarely addressed, leaving affected populations without adequate support systems. Similarly, Eze and Adeoye (2023) explore coping mechanisms and their limitations in mitigating the depressive impact of fuel subsidy removal. They found that while some individuals resort to cost-cutting measures and social support networks, these strategies are not universally effective. Vulnerable populations, such as single-income families and informal sector workers, often experience prolonged depressive symptoms due to inadequate safety nets. Eze and Adeoye advocate for targeted mental health interventions, including community-based counseling services and policy reforms that integrate mental health considerations. Their study underscores the need for a holistic approach to addressing depression as a consequence of economic reforms like fuel subsidy removal.

The subsidy removal intensifies social inequality, leading to resentment and a perception of neglect among public employees. These feelings can disrupt workplace relationships and contribute to psychological stress (Ering & Akpan, 2012; Feng et al., 2018). Public university staff adopt strategies like carpooling, reducing non-essential expenses, or seeking alternative income sources. However, these adjustments often fail to fully offset the mental and physical toll of the increased financial burden (Chiluwa, 2015; Manjo, 2023). Limited government support or poorly implemented mitigation measures for public workers have compounded these effects. Researchers advocate for targeted relief programs, such as transport stipends or salary adjustments, to alleviate these pressures (Greve & Lay, 2023; Harun et al., 2018). therefore, there are proven negative and adverse effect of subsidy removal and inceassant increase of fuel on the mental health of librarians.

Influence of Fuel- Subsidy Removal on Job-Satisfaction and Stress among Workers in Nigeria

The removal of fuel subsidies is a contentious policy decision that has far-reaching consequences across various sectors of society. Among the groups significantly impacted by such policy changes are civil servants. Bankole (2001) reported that fuel scarcity has always affected the Nigerian population right from time. Civil servants play a pivotal role in the functioning of governments and the delivery of public services. When fuel subsidies are removed, it often leads to increased fuel prices, which can have several direct and indirect effects on civil servants. Job satisfaction is a complex and multi-dimensional concept that refers to an individual's overall emotional and cognitive evaluation of their job or work experience. It represents the extent to which an employee feels content, fulfilled, and positive about various aspects of their job, including their roles, responsibilities, working conditions, and the overall work environment. Job satisfaction reflects the employee's perception of how well their job aligns with their expectations, values, and needs. High fuel prices and increased financial stress can affect civil servants' overall morale and productivity. Reduced job satisfaction can lead to decreased commitment and engagement in their roles. (Chinedu, & Ebele, 2012).

In 2012 when the government of President Goodluck Jonathan removed fuel subsidy for the first time, Agboola (2012) noted that the effect then drastically affected civil servants and low business owners. After the removal of the fuel subsidy there was a resultant strike, which successfully grounded economic activities around the country for one whole week, with Nigeria losing approximated N320 billion per day. From some state capitals came reports that governors, who earlier decided at the National Economic Council (NEC) to advise the Federal Government to remove fuel subsidy had started siding with the people and encouraging protests." (Ayodele, 2020).

The rise in fuel prices can lead to increased commuting costs for civil servants, reducing their disposable income. This financial strain can contribute to stress as they struggle to meet their daily expenses. The negative implications include that it may decrease economic growth in the short term, increase inflation, increase poverty, increase fuel smuggling, increase crime, increase the prices of petroleum products and loss of jobs in the informal sector (Peterson and Kingsley, 2023). Ezeh, et al., (2023) noted that Policy changes like fuel subsidy removal can create a sense of job insecurity among civil servants. The uncertainty about future policy decisions can add to their stress and anxiety. Further studies have revealed that Increased stress can negatively impact civil servants' productivity, potentially affecting the quality and efficiency of public service delivery (Sarpu, 2008).

Understanding the stress that civil servants face after fuel subsidy removal is crucial for policymakers and organizations. Providing support systems, such as flexible work arrangements, financial counseling, and mental health resources, can help civil servants cope with the challenges arising from these policy changes. Hence the importance of this paper. Fuel subsidy removal can have significant implications for the well-being of civil servants. As key contributors to public service, their stress levels can impact their ability to carry out their responsibilities effectively. Recognizing these challenges and implementing supportive measures is essential to maintain a motivated and productive civil service workforce. More so, Job satisfaction is a critical factor in employee well-being and can have significant implications for an organization's success. Satisfied employees tend to be more motivated, engaged, and committed to their work, leading to higher productivity, lower turnover rates, and a more positive work atmosphere. Conversely, low job satisfaction can result in decreased performance, absenteeism, and increased turnover, which can be detrimental to both individuals and the organization as a whole. This study hopes to investigate the effect of the subsidy removal on librarians in south-south Nigeria.

People may adopt various coping mechanisms in response to the un-foretold hardship that fuel subsidies removal may come with and the associated challenges it presents. These coping mechanisms can help them navigate the increased financial strain, longer commutes, and potential job-related stressors resulting from higher fuel prices. individuals may become more diligent in budgeting their finances, cutting unnecessary expenses, and prioritizing essential spending to cope with the increased cost of fuel. Some may explore alternative transportation options such as carpooling, public transportation, or biking to reduce fuel costs and ease the financial burden.

Citizens may seek flexible work arrangements, such as telecommuting or adjusted work hours, to reduce commuting expenses and improve work-life balance. Others may consider part-time jobs or freelance work to supplement their income and offset the financial impact of higher fuel prices. Investing in professional development and acquiring new skills may enhance peoples job security and employability, helping them feel more confident in their careers. More so, Building and participating in peer support networks within the community can provide emotional support and a forum for sharing coping strategies. Citizens may engage in advocacy efforts or become more active in unions to influence workplace policies and advocate for fair compensation and benefits in response to economic policy changes. It is important to recognize that coping mechanisms can vary widely among individuals, and what works for an individual may not work for another. Additionally, employers and organizations can play a crucial role in supporting their staff during times of economic change by offering benefits, resources, and policies that promote financial well-being and job satisfaction.

Research Method

The study adopted a descriptive survey design to investigate the psychological impact of fuel subsidy removal on pubic university librarians in South-South Nigeria. The purpose of this design is to get the views of specifically, librarians working within the public university library system in Nigeria's South-South region using a well-structured online Google form questionnaire. Structured questionnaires were used to gather quantitative data, The population of the study comprised all the professional librarians in the public University in the South-South region in Nigeria, which was a total of 223 librarians across the University libraries in South-South Nigeria. Census Sampling was used since the population size is manageable. From the google form questionnaire, 126 responses were used for the analysis. Mean scores were used to analyze data collected in line with the research questions designed for this study on a 4-point Likert scale (ranging from 4-1). Decision for acceptance was made based on the scores obtained from the results. Any mean score from 2.50 and above were accepted and any mean score below 2.50 were rejected.

Research Question 1: How has the removal of fuel subsidy affected your stress levels?

Table 1: Summary of Mean Score Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Stress Levels of Librarians

S/NO	ITEM STATEMENT	SA	A	D	SD	TOTAL	MEAN	DECISION
1	Increase financial stress	105	21	0	0	126	3.50	Agreed
2	Reduction of job satisfaction	42	49	21	14	126	2.59	Agreed
3	Negative effects on mental health	70	49	7	0	126	3.50	Agreed
4	Inability to perform maximally	49	49	21	7	126	3.11	Agreed
5	Inability to provide quality library service	35	56	21	14	126	2.73	Agreed
6	Inability to relate well with library users	21	28	63	14	126	2.12	Disagreed
7	Seeking alternative employment	35	49	42	0	126	2.76	Agreed

Table 1 above reveals the stress faced by librarians from the removal of fuel subsidy. From the item statement, increase in financial stress (Mean = 3.50) and negative effects on mental health (Mean = 3.50) scored the highest. Inability to perform maximally (Mean = 3.11) and seeking alternative employment (Mean = 2.76). The lowest mean value was inability to relate well with users (Mean = 2.12) which was disagreed by the librarians.

Research Question 2: How has the removal of fuel subsidy influenced your job satisfaction?

Table 2: Summary of Mean on Fuel Subsidy Influenced Your Job Satisfaction

S/No	Item Statement	SA	A	D	SD	Total	Mean	Decision
8	It has made it more difficult to work all the time	63	63	0	0	126	3.50	Agreed
9	Reduced operating budget	70	49	7	0	126	3.50	Agreed
10	Increase in price of library resources which has led to inadequate resources	63	56	7	0	126	3.44	Agreed
11	Inability to focus on the job	42	49	35	0	126	3.06	Agreed
12	Fear of security of a job	35	49	28	14	126	2.68	Agreed

Table 2 above revealed that Increased difficulty in working consistently (Mean = 3.50) and reduction in operating budget (Mean = 3.50) has the highest mean, increase in price of resources (Mean = 3.44) , while inability to focus (Mean = 3.06) and fear of job security (Mean = 2.68) has the lowest mean.

Research Question 3: What are the coping mechanisms you can adopt in response to the removal of fuel subsidies?

Table 3: Summary of Mean Score on Coping Mechanisms to the Removal of Fuel Subsidies?

S/No	Item Statement	VA	A	LA	NA	Total	Mean	Decision
13	Ride-sharing with colleagues	63	63	0	0	126	3.50	Accept
14	Public transportation as an alternative to driving	77	49	0	0	126	3.61	Accept

15	Working remotely on part-time basis	70	49	7	0	126	3.50	Accept
16	Financial advice on how to manage finances	49	70	7	0	126	3.33	Accept
17	Skills development for alternative source of income	84	35	7	0	126	3.61	Accept
18	Taking deliberate steps to take care of oneself mentally and physically	70	49	7	0	126	3.50	Accept
19	Communicating with colleagues to share a coping mechanism	63	42	21	0	126	3.33	Accept

Table 3 shows that public transport (Mean = 3.61) and skills development for alternative income (Mean = 3.61) were the most adopted strategies. Working remotely (Mean = 3.50) and self-care (Mean = 3.50) were also agreed as coping mechanisms, while communicating with colleagues (Mean = 3.33) and financial advice (Mean = 3.33) had moderate mean scores, but still suggest proactive behavioral adjustments.

Discussion of Findings:

Impact of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Stress Levels of Librarians

The data reveals that majority of librarians experienced increased financial stress and mental health challenges such as anxiety and inability to perform maximally due to the removal of fuel subsidies. This finding corroborates with the work of Harring et al. (2023) and Ekong and Akpan (2014), in their work they argue that economic reforms, including subsidy removal, result in heightened psychological stress as individuals struggle with increased transportation and living costs. In addition, Babatunde et al. (2023) assert that chronic stress and anxiety arise when professionals face rising expenses without corresponding increases in income, which diminishes their emotional resilience. Ikenga & Oluka (2023) also emphasize that stress-related symptoms, such as fatigue, restlessness, and sleep disturbances, significantly impair job performance, echoing the data's indication of diminished capacity to deliver quality services.

Influence of Fuel Subsidy Removal on Job Satisfaction

Findings in table 2 suggest that fuel subsidy removal has negatively influenced job satisfaction. The reduced operating budget and cost of professional resources directly impact workplace efficiency and morale. These views were supported by Chinedu and Ebele (2012), they explain that rising fuel costs decrease job satisfaction by lowering disposable income and increasing stress, which erodes commitment to work. Agboola (2012) and Ayodele (2020) in their work documented the aftermath of past subsidy removals, noting widespread dissatisfaction among civil servants, with some even taking to industrial action due to the impact on welfare and morale. In addition, Peterson & Kingsley (2023) emphasize that economic instability resulting from subsidy removal can reduce productivity and increase workplace dissatisfaction.

In addition, the fear of job security suggests underlying uncertainty about future institutional support and stability. Sarpu (2008) highlights that fear and insecurity in the workplace often result in low morale and reduced efficiency, which further compromise the delivery of educational and research services in university libraries.

Coping Mechanisms Adopted by Librarians

The findings revealed strategies such as public transportation, skills development and working remotely as the most acceptable form of coping mechanism employed by librarians in South-South. This agrees with Uzochukwu et al. (2022) and Eze and Adeoye (2023). They found that carpooling, budgeting, and skills acquisition are prominent coping mechanisms among Nigerian professionals. However, they also have alternative views, as such strategies are not always sustainable or equally accessible, especially for those without flexible job structures or additional income sources. Manjo (2023) and Chiluwa (2015) also noted that while workers adopt short-term adjustments like cost-cutting and ride-sharing, psychological stress persists when there are no structured support systems. Suleiman & Okonkwo (2020) emphasized that unrelenting stress without effective systemic interventions can spiral into long-term mental health challenges, even if temporary coping mechanisms are in place. The findings indicate that while librarians exhibit resilience, there is still a critical need for institutional and governmental interventions, such as transport stipends, mental health counseling, and economic incentives, to provide a more sustainable buffer against recurring financial shocks.

Conclusion

Psychological well-being is an important tool in maintaining a good work force. Librarians are not left out. The result above has demonstrated that fuel subsidy removal has affected the levels of anxiety and depression that exist among library staff. While the price of fuel keeps increasing, there is high likelihood that the psychological well-being of library staff will be going down. The result indicates that deliberate measures should be put in place to help the library staff cope with the situation at hand.

Recommendations

Based on the findings of this research, it is recommended that:

1. Targeted interventions be implemented to mitigate the psychological impact of fuel subsidy removal on library staff in South-South Nigeria.
2. Employers, particularly in educational and public institutions, should prioritize the provision of mental health support services, such as access to counseling and stress management programs.
3. These services can help staff members develop effective coping mechanisms for anxiety and depression associated with economic changes. Additionally, financial assistance programs, such as transportation allowances or subsidies, should be introduced to reduce the financial strain on staff and enhance their overall well-being.
4. On a broader scale, policymakers should consider the psychological consequences of economic reforms like subsidy removal when designing and implementing such policies. Stakeholder engagement and proactive communication strategies are critical to ensuring transparency and building trust.
5. The government should provide cushioning measures, such as phased implementation of subsidy removal and social welfare programs targeted at low-income earners, including library staff.

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