



Societal Expectations and Well-being of Academics: Views from University Lecturers in Ghana

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Authors' contributions

This work was carried out in collaboration between both authors. Author DWO designed the study wrote the protocol, conducted the literature searches, transcribed the qualitative data and performed data analysis. Author JB supervised the literature searches, data analysis and discussions. Both authors read and approved the final manuscript.

Article Information

DOI: 10.9734/JESBS/2020/v33i1030266

Editor(s):

(1) Dr. Prince Nwachukwu Ololube, Ignatius Ajuru University of Education, Nigeria.

Reviewers:

(1) Dawood Abdulmalek Yahya AL-Hidabi, International Islamic University, Malaysia.

(2) Getinet Seifu Walde, Mettu University, Ethiopia.

Complete Peer review History: <http://www.sdiarticle4.com/review-history/62571>

Original Research Article

Received 28 August 2020

Accepted 04 November 2020

Published 26 November 2020

ABSTRACT

Background: The study aimed to investigate how societal expectation on educational accomplishments can affect workplace well-being of university lecturers. University education is seen by society as the highest level of educational accomplishment in a person's life and people with such accomplishments are often held in higher esteem by society. In Ghana, this expectation puts pressure on lecturers who are known to have attained higher educational accomplishments.

Methods: The study used a qualitative research approach to solicit views from 18 public university lecturers in Ghana. Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) for data analysis was used to interpret the opinions of lecturers about what society expects of them, how that affects their well-being at work and shifts that are needed to address those expectations.

Results: The study found that society indeed expects a lot from university lecturers (core university functions and other cultural and economic issues). Societal expectations have both positive and negative effects on the well-being of lecturers. Findings show that respect that lecturers receive from society provides leverage for positive well-being, while financial pressures placed on them tend to create emotional stresses which impact negatively on their well-being.

Conclusion: To our knowledge, this study is the first of its kind to examine the experiences of well-being amongst university academics in Ghana. Results suggest that how the role of university

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academics is perceived by society can create pressures which affect their well-being negatively. This study highlights the importance of these findings and their impact on well-being. It shows that societal expectations are linked to sociocultural beliefs and economic factors in a developing country context. The authors recommend a mind-set shift amongst society and academics to bring expectations from both sides closer together; through education; engaging community talks on the pressures of societal expectations and demands to create awareness, and observing cultural beliefs that impact the understanding of well-being issues. These initiatives could potentially reduce the pressure of unrealistic expectations on academics and other “knowledge workers”.

Keywords: University lecturers; workplace; well-being; expectations; pressure.

1. INTRODUCTION

University education has long been seen by society as the highest level of educational accomplishment in a person's life. Society therefore celebrates and respects individuals who get the chance to study and graduate from university [1]. This act has created an impression that university degree holders are better economically and have more employment opportunities in life than those without a university education [1,2]. Therefore, the societal expectation on the educational accomplishment of a person tends to affect one's sense of purpose, resilience and ability to perform within a particular social context including the workplace [3].

University lecturers also find themselves among the group of individuals that society holds in high esteem because of their higher academic accomplishments. Traditionally, universities are known as places of learning and research and society expect universities to contribute to the knowledge economy, maintenance of advanced knowledge, teaching and research, and community service [4]. University lecturers engage in various kinds of work which conventionally can be grouped into three areas; research, teaching and community services [5].

The diversity in tasks from the three-domain areas clearly defines the complexity of work expected of university lecturers. Expectations from society may transcend beyond the core academic functions to other cultural and economic issues in some countries.

In Ghana, societal expectations are perceived to put a lot of pressure on those who have attained the highest qualifications in academia; lecturers are expected to know everything that happens around them and have answers to all the questions asked by members of society because they are perceived as being knowledgeable. Because Ghanaian society perceives academic

employees to have a well-paid job and good financial status in society, they place a lot of financial and social demands on them [6]. When these demands are not fulfilled, it tends to create enmity and confusion between them, their families and friends. The pressures from societal expectations on university lecturers no doubt raise several well-being questions: How can pressures from societal expectations affect the well-being of university lecturers? What are the shifts needed to address these pressures and tensions? This study investigated these questions aimed at academics from three public university lecturers in Ghana using a qualitative approach. To our knowledge, this is the first study to examine the lived experience of well-being amongst university lecturers in the Ghanaian context. Previous studies in this area have been driven mainly by quantitative approaches [7,8] and lack an examination of the issues from the perspectives of those whose lives are affected by them.

1.1 How Can Societal Expectations Influence a Person's Self-esteem?

The societal expectation of a person's self-esteem has generated a lot of concern in academic circles - evolving from Gergen's theory of 'saturated self' [9,10]. Gergen's theory shows that a person's "self-esteem" is reliant on the expectations of society. Gergen is of the view that realities of life from societal expectations influence one's self-esteem, one's identity, and one's reaction within a particular context [11]. One's reaction in a particular context is similar to action, belief and consequence (the ABCs of safety steps) and one of the key elements of 'cognitive behaviour therapies' [12]. These basic steps are used to determine why people act the way they do. In effect, they help to analyse how actions are interpreted by the observer based on their belief, which then influences their behaviours and determines the consequences of actions.

According to Gergen, societal expectations can serve as probable barriers to an individual's progress and this can result in the loss of lasting emotional strength and positive outcome. Powell [3] attests that societal context can strongly contribute to career and academic successes of individuals. Yet, most often, societal expectations are based on perceptions and vice versa leading to observer-actor bias. According to Démuth [6], these constitute both cognitive and emotional facets - sourced from either within or outside the subject. Démuth [6] argues that such perceptions are probably caused by individuals' ideas. The basis for those ideas remains a question that is believed to form the content and diversity of society. So what defines these perceptions and expectations in society? Many scholars have argued that these perceptions and expectations are possibly determined from a combination of what people say and do; the stories and impressions made about someone; and what people say about themselves [6,13].

Within the workplace, individuals require certain skills to adapt to these expectations from society and the adaptive capacity to respond to the process of change in emotions depends on the demands on an individual's profession, work environment or on their status in society [14,15]. From a professional perspective, Heinze [14] describes this as an "unpleasant feeling" as society expects people from certain professions to act in certain ways in social situations. Demands from certain professions demonstrate how difficult it has become for them to conform to societal pressure and designated norms [16]. On the part of the work environment, Powell [3] believes that the external environment can affect one's motivation and desire to succeed. For example, the demands, expectations and support of families and friends have the possibility of increasing work pressures and family conflicts on employees in Hong Kong universities [17].

1.2 Pressures from Societal Expectations and Employee Well-being

Workplace well-being has been a major topic of discussion globally by employees and employers across all organisations [18,19]. The reason is that employee well-being at work is linked to high employee satisfaction and work outcomes [20,21,22]. Indeed, Nielsen et al. [22] have shown how positive issues at the workplace can improve productivity. Therefore, workplace issues which impact negatively on lecturers' should be a major concern for employers

because these issues are likely to affect performance and student learning. Although the work of academics is full of stress, they also enjoy the prestige and respect that comes along with expectations from society [23]. Beijgaard et al. [24] have contributed to this discussion:

'A society in which the lecturers' role is understood and they are allowed to go about their social life freely without any pressure from the public would create positive well-being for lecturers' (p. 750) [24].

A recent study on the well-being of higher academic employees shows that leadership, personal mind-set shifts and political interference constitute a Change-Effect Model that shapes the well-being of academic employees during organisational reforms [25]. According to Ofori and Antwi [25], the change-effect model provides the effects of higher academic reforms on academic employees which hitherto had not received much policy attention. The mind-set shifts identified include personal changes that happen to higher academic employees in response to certain actions as a result of organisational change. So far as the mind-set shift can motivate emotional strength during the reform, the positive well-being of the person is always assured. Can these mind-set shifts also help lecturers to respond positively to societal expectations and indeed balance those expectations with their well-being needs? Archer et al. [26] argue that a mind-set shift amongst society (and particularly those individuals in society who hold the strongest socio-cultural beliefs) is needed. In terms of this study, a shift in the direction of a more accurate understanding of the role of lecturers may in turn help to reduce the pressure of unrealistic expectations on academics. The relationship between mind-set shifts and well-being, therefore, provides the theoretical basis that is envisioned to resolve the conundrum around this dilemma.

2. METHODOLOGY

2.1 Research Approach, Population and Sampling

We used qualitative research methods to capture the experience of academics from three public universities in Ghana. The three universities together had a student population of over 47, 505 and academic staff of 1,500. The academic staff were all full-time employees with ranks from lecturers, senior lecturers and heads of the

department across seven faculties. We used a non-probability sampling technique (snowballing) also known as chain-referral sampling, to identify and select participants. All participants had more than five years' experience in their academic career. In all, 40 participants from the three universities were invited and 18 agreed to be interviewed to participate in the study.

2.2 Data Collection Procedures

We conducted in-depth interviews to find out their views on what society expects from them because of their academic accomplishments and how those expectations affect their work and well-being. Given the focus of the investigation involved experiences of lecturers at their workplace, we were mindful of the domains of lecturers work (teaching, research and community service) and that some aspects of the work transcend beyond the workplace to the community. We were specific in the interviews and focused mainly in exploring their accounts of; what they think society expects from them outside their core academic functions; the effect of those expectations on all the three domains of their work; the mind-set shifts needed to address the societal expectations.

Interviews were mainly conducted on a one-to-one basis around three main questions using a semi-structured interview guide. Participants were able to communicate at their own pace, decided on the extent of information they were willing to give to shape their stories. By drawing inferences from the complexity of their work, participants were able to reflect on their experiences and that eventually helped them to construct interpretations to societal expectations that affect their work and well-being. The data produced and its quality was mostly dependent on the willingness of participants to tell their story and their ability to reflect on the important occurrences, experiences and consequences. In this instance, participants' time, flexibility and willingness to recount their experiences were reflected in the duration of the interviews, with interviews lasting between thirty minutes and one hour. All were audio-recorded, transcribed and coded for analysis.

2.3 Data Analysis

2.3.1 Interpretative phenomenology approach

We used the Interpretative Phenomenology Approach (IPA) for the data analysis.

Phenomenology is a philosophical approach and science of the first-person viewpoint with an emphasis on the lived experience of individuals [27]. It encompasses an in-depth investigation of an individual's experience of a specific phenomenon, how they make sense of that experience and the meaning they attach to it. We used the steps of data analysis and interpretation of the IPA framework proposed by Smith et al. [28]. We covered a phase-by-phase analysis of the claims, understanding and concerns of participants.

This approach involves the identification of commonalities, distinction and emergent themes and emphasises divergence and convergence from individual transcripts [29,30]. We followed the six main steps of IPA; Step 1: reading, re-reading and transcription, Step 2: initial noting of emerging themes, Step 3: developing emergent themes, Step 4: searching for connections across emergent themes, Step 5: moving to the next case Step 6: looking for patterns across cases. This enabled us to produce a circular interpretation instead of linear interpretations and dynamic thinking that led to an inductive approach moving from specifics to the communal and to the interpretive [30]. Participants' stories are presented in verbatim quotations with pseudonyms for the sake of confidentiality.

2.4 Data Validity and Reliability

One of the key considerations in carrying out a qualitative study is how to ensure the trustworthiness and authenticity of the study. Polkinghorne [31] indicates that 'evidence of the participants' stories and issues collected is not to ascertain if some of the issues truly happen but is about the meaning experienced by the people' [Polkinghorne 2007:479]. Subsequently, in this study, we did not intend to confirm the facts. Rather, we sought to explore the views of lecturers about what society expects of them due to their academic accomplishment and how that affects their work and well-being. This position is supported by Riessman [32] who indicates that 'verification of the 'fact' is less salient than understanding the changing meaning of events for the individual involved. Riessman further explained how these changing events, in turn, are located in culture and history. To create an effective, strong and powerful relationship with the participants [33], the first author spent time with them (visiting their lecture halls, laboratories and staff canteen to eat together) before the interviews. This was done to gain an

understanding of their experience at work, build rapport, and to ensure credibility and trustworthiness of the study. The analysis and interpretation made by the first author was subsequently checked by the second author to ensure validity and reliability of the data.

3. RESULTS AND ANALYSIS

3.1 Demographic Characteristics of the Respondents

Participants from the three study sites had worked at the various universities for five years or more with ranks ranging from lecturers to senior lecturers and heads of department. Participants ranged in age between 35 to 50 years and worked across different faculties in the selected universities.

Table 1 shows that Site A produced the highest number of participants with a total number of 6, out of the 15 invited. Most participants were happy and willing to contact colleagues at the other study sites to encourage them to take part in the study. This shows the importance of using the snowball approach, as one key participant can reach out to other participants with similar experiences and educational background, thus reducing the time and effort spent by the researcher in the recruitment process.

3.2 Lecturers' Views of What Their University Work Means to Them and What Society Expects of Them

Participants expressed the pressures they face as lecturers in higher academic institutions with the title of "Doctor". For example, Cynthia, a female lecturer who was a Head of Department at the time of the interview explicitly explained the pressure put on her by society, her extended family and friends for being a "Doctor" and teaching at the university:

"Oh, well, teaching at the University is prestigious and commands a certain level of respect in society. In terms of money and influence, society sees it as such. In the Ghanaian context, once you are a lecturer, you are considered rich without society even seeing your payslip. Hmm, what I am telling you is not a joke. Society expects a lot from you; for example, as a lecturer, because of your mobility, you decide to go for a loan and get a car so that your movement in and around campus become faster,

once people see you in that car, it means you are rich, hmm, 'nsem pii' [it's many issues].

Again, families, friends, church members and even some university staff "labourers" see us as rich and when they ask for financial assistance, and you are not able to help, it means you are wicked, not friendly and they tag you with all sorts of name-calling. This behaviour affects you emotionally in addition to the workload at the university" (Cynthia).

Cynthia continued to cite specific examples of societal pressures on her:

"For example: on admissions, people will just bring their children to you and expect you to get them admitted. They expect that once you are a lecturer, you should be able to do that for them. They demand things as if the whole university belongs to me, hmm, [sigh]. Sometimes, I tell my mother not to give my phone numbers to family members in the village, not that I do not want to help or talk to them, but it's the sorts of demand they place on you, and if you are not able to help, it turns to all sorts of family problems" (Cynthia).

Another male participant Daniel supported what Cynthia said as follows:

"When you go to your village and you are called a "Doctor" you are like "God or next to God" ha-ha [laughs]. Family and church members all look up to you for financial support. It's good to know that society respects those who have studied up to a PhD level and are called "Doctors". But the problem is anything that happens in the village the "villagers" will wait for the "Doctor" to come. You are seen as the most intelligent person, and you should have answers to every problem, and this can be frustrating sometimes" (Daniel, lecturer for 11 years).

Daniel's story is a reminder to academic employees that their work is not only limited to the walls of their universities but extends to the wider society in terms of provision and assistance. Daniel shared specific examples of his experiences from his community:

"For example, I get invitations to chair community development programs in the village, and this comes with its financial burden on me. People come to me with their children to discuss their university course choices. Others will come and discuss their court cases with me and request that I get them a good lawyer from the city.

Table 1. Respondents’ participation rate

Means of recruitment	Total number sampled	Agreed to take part	Participation rate
Site A	15	6	40%
Site B	12	5	41%
Site C	9	5	55%
Colleagues’ referral	4	2	50%
Total	40	18	45%

Source: Field Data, 2018

Some will go to the extent of showing me their medical report, and when you tell them you are not a medical doctor, they don’t understand and feel you don’t want to help them, ha-ha. Sometimes I have to leave my village unannounced to avoid some people. The fact is, it’s difficult to ignore them because they are your people, they appreciate you and need your help, but the pressure can be overwhelming” (Daniel).

Another participant explained:

“Well, there is a level of prestige; I think society respects you as a lecturer with a PhD qualification and at the same time they demand a lot in return. We, the lecturers, are always the first to be invited to “chair” community programs, which means that we have to support with money and not just the talk. Most of my colleagues complain about the financial demands from their extended families, especially during funerals and church activities” (Katrina, Associate Head of Department for 6 years).

Katrina continued to explain what happens if she is not able to honour those invitations:

“Hmm, they think you are unkind. Sometimes, you may even be struggling financially, but they do not understand that” (Katrina).

Participants indicated that society sees their university work as prestigious and that commands a certain level of respect. They alluded to the fact that they enjoy the respect society accords them because of their positive influence on people and the work they do. However, the financial pressures placed on them, as earlier indicated in their stories, tend to create emotional stresses in addition to their work-related ones which impact negatively on their well-being. Expressions used by participants to show their frustration as a result of the constant financial demands from society included: “I am financially drained all the time”, “there is pressure on me to give out money when I chair a program” and “I am expected to have answers to all societal problems”.

This phenomenon is common in Ghanaian society, especially in places where most people are uneducated and therefore depend on the few educated ones in their communities to get information on educational and other programs for their children and their livelihoods. From participant stories, it was clear that self-identity and image was important to them. Due to that, they try to honour most of the invitations they receive to reduce the negative impact that not attending may have on their public image and career.

Participant’s responses indicate individuals who value their social and professional identities. They described their social image as key to reinforcing their authority in society. However, in trying to reinforce their identity, they faced challenges such as having to live a life worthy of emulation by their students and conforming to social standards. For example, one participant said:

“In Ghana, every action and movement of a lecturer is scrutinised by society as if the lecturer is a super-human being. You can’t make a mistake as a lecturer, especially in public because you don’t know who is watching. Ghanaians set their standards for you to follow” (Anthony, lecturer for 10 years).

Anthony lamented how these expectations can affect his life:

“You are constantly on the alert to not make a mistake; this puts huge pressure on you. Sometimes I feel that anytime I’m out and about in town, people are watching me and it brings my confidence down. Lecturers are not supposed to make a mistake, hmm, ha-ha [laughs], and it is difficult in this part of our world (Anthony).

Prince contributed to this discussion with another story:

“In Ghana, lecturers are respected and have authority. We are also expected to be role

models for our students and society. As a lecturer, you cannot be seen publicly drunk and be walking about improperly dressed. Society frowns on a certain lifestyle. I am sure where you are coming from it is different” (Prince).

Jane, who has been a lecturer for eight years explained how societal expectations can affect her life:

“So, hmm, for me I find the expectations scary and I am extremely careful when I go out, and this restricts me. If I make a mistake, it becomes deadly” (Jane, lecturer for 8 years).

The stories show that the Ghanaian public has high expectations of academics and wants to see them live up to that expectation. These expectations have their downsides, as previously explained by Jane and Prince: it puts enormous pressure on them. Although mistakes are generally a part of being human (and we are supposed to learn from them in line with what Heinze [14] describes as an “unpleasant feeling”), Jane believes that making a public mistake as a university lecturer with the title “Doctor” affects her social identity. Because of this, she is extra careful with her public engagements, as she details:

“Ghanaian society expects you to know everything because you are a “Doctor”. Sometimes with the questions they ask, the “Doctor” doesn’t even know the head and the tail of what they are asking. This is scary because if you make a mistake, it affects you as a person and the same people will turn around and say this “Doctor” from this university does not know anything” (Jane).

Beijaard et al. [24] have shown that a society in which the lecturer’s role is understood and lecturers were able to go about their social life freely without pressure from the public, would create an atmosphere for positive well-being. Although this does not appear to be the case with most participants, there was evidence that some had developed a sense of control over the pressure:

“For me, I don’t let the pressure get to me too much, I try to do my best. If I can’t do something, I tell them so I can feel free instead of worrying about what people will think about me because I am a “Doctor” (Anthony).

Participant’s stories expressed concerns about their social identities, how their lives have

changed because of their titles (Doctors), and working at the university. They regularly described the changes in their emotions and performances as a result of the pressure society puts on them. In line with the work of Goffman [15], this process of change in emotions is due to the demands others make of us as individuals, based on profession and public image. They do this based on how they see, answer and treat us. For example, Jack explained:

“To me, the pressure is good. It gives me the drive to do more for people and at the same time to be careful of what I say and do. It is good to know that people look up to you and recognise you are intelligent. The problem, however, is the “Doctor” should have answers to everything” (Jack, lecturer for 15 years).

Jack explained how becoming a lecturer working at a university has positively changed his life and behaviour. Before becoming a lecturer with a PhD, Jack describes that he was “a loud scientist” who would challenge his colleagues in the laboratory on different issues and also engaged in public debates in drinking bars. He would say things freely without worrying about what society saw and said of him. As a result of gaining a PhD, Jack has now adopted a “quiet scientist” identity with a humble attitude to prevent society from saying negative things that will affect his image, professional identity and work [6]. Jack’s change in attitude can be seen as a response to the pressure from society mentioned earlier. Archer et al. [26] argue that this practice allows the individual to be more mindful of their actions and self-image in transforming their behaviour into a more socially “acceptable” one. This helps the individual to live up to the standards required by Ghanaian society and also gain the recognition for having the title “Doctor” and working at the university.

Participants were also worried about the continuous scrutiny of their social lives and the financial demands from their extended families, friends and some members of the public. For example, Frank explained:

“Whenever there is a funeral in the family or the community, everybody will wait for the lecturer to come, take decisions and take the lead in contributing money. Families and friends depend on you so much that even if you tell them you don’t have money or do not have what they asking for, they don’t believe you. This can be frustrating” (Frank, lecturer for 6 years).

Frank believes that these constant expectations of financial demands and support for social activities from family members and the general public make the whole profession challenging. He and his colleagues are constantly under pressure, looking for ways to meet these demands. Two of the participants understood the social pressure and appear to be getting on with their lives. However, other two of the participants (Stanley and Peter) recounted their experiences at funeral grounds and a church fundraising programme as follows:

“I was embarrassed at a funeral when a lady walked to me and demanded I help with her diagnosis because she heard I was a “Doctor”. I politely explain to her that I am not a medical doctor but rather a university lecturer and cannot help. This woman was not happy with my explanation and said why people should be called doctors if they were not, and she said to me, ‘you are a fake doctor then’. I was shocked at her reaction, with others sitting around looking at me” (Stanley).

Stanley’s experience appears to have a negative impact on his social image and believes a section of society does not understand the work of academics with “Doctor” as a title. He explained again:

“Most of our people do not understand our title. The life of a ‘doctor’ in our society is more of a celebrity but has its challenges. I will be much happier if I attend these events and not be introduced as a “Doctor”. I think that will help me to enjoy the event better. I wonder what the medical doctors go through” (Stanley).

Stanley saw his embarrassment as a challenge and a phase in his career (part of his identity) which he has to go through, as he explained again:

“Honestly, I believe this is part of a life I have to live now as I can’t do much about it. I have to find ways to deal with the negatives and focus on the good things I can do to better the lives of my folks” (Stanley).

Stanley’s story suggests that he has not completely lost interest in attending public events, but he is concerned about unexpected occurrences. Also, he has internalised some of the external expectations that have been imposed upon him.

4. DISCUSSION

4.1 Effects of Pressures from Societal Expectations on the Well-being of University Lecturers

Stories from participants in this study emphasise the importance of their identities (social and professional) to their well-being. This was seen to have a relationship with individual respect and status at work and constitutes positive well-being. Pressure from society was seen to impact negatively on the social identity and well-being of participants. They indicated that society sees their work as prestigious and well paid. However, they were also worried about the unwelcomed attention this misperception brings to them in public places. The experiences expressed show that lecturers are aware of what society expects from them. This brings to bear a certain level of consciousness among the lecturers and in effect places on them considerable pressure to react. The extent of their reaction is based on the belief they hold. Examples include the experiences of Daniel and Cynthia earlier presented.

4.1.1 The negative effect of expectations on lecturers’ well-being

Most participants were more concerned about the external pressure (financial demand and public expectations) from the Ghanaian society on them than their internal ones (long working hours and the lack of resources). This, they said, causes unease in their daily lives and work. What participants were mostly worried about is the wrong societal perception about their career, which added pressure to their lives. These external pressures, they said, ‘scare’ them to the extent that, they sometimes refuse invitations to attend public events. Their worry is rooted in the fact that, whenever they are unable to meet the expectation of society, they are seen as insensitive to the plight of others and are tagged with “name-calling” such as ‘wicked, unkind and selfish’ people. These comments, they said, negatively affect their lives, as illustrated by the experiences of Katrina, Cynthia, Jack, Stanley and Daniel.

A possible explanation to this is the cultural and social settings in Ghana where the less educated people with few employment opportunities, depend on the fewer educated ones who get good jobs and are expected to support their families and others to make a living. Another plausible explanation is the extended family

system practice in Ghana, where anybody fortunate to get a job does not only take care of his or her immediate family but is also expected to extend financial support to siblings and their children, cousins, and the entire family (usually called 'family lines'). When an individual is overwhelmed with such family, societal, and work pressure, there is burn-out which in turn leads to all forms of anxieties expressed by the participants in this study. Also, there is a possibility of an underlying cultural factor which this study has hinted on, which resonates with the work of Luk and Shaffer [17] that the demands, expectations and support of families and friends have the potential to increase work pressures and family conflicts.

4.1.2 The positive effect of expectations on lecturers' well-being

Despite the work pressures experienced by participants in this study, they also appear to show a sign of considerable fulfilment in some aspects of their work and the high recognition accorded their profession by the Ghanaian society. For example, Katrina said: "There is a level of prestige and society respects you." Jack also said: "as a lecturer, you are like a celebrity when you go out". These experiences support the work of Winefield et al. [23] that although the work of academics is full of stress, they also enjoy the prestige and respect that comes along with it.

4.2 Mind-set Shifts Needed to Address Societal Pressures on University Lecturers

Participants' stories showed that societal expectations could affect the wellbeing of lecturers both positively and negatively. Most of the participants said that the pressure is crushing and they wish the public did not know they were lecturers and 'doctors' working at the university. Participants' "accounts" of change in their lives and professions demonstrate how difficult it has become for them to conform to societal pressure and designated norms [16].

The need to address this partly depends on the lecturers and that requires personal mind-set shifts. The evidence suggests that the mind-set shifts of some respondents – to accept the reality and create the right impression on the minds of the individuals in their community has helped them. For instance, some participants tried to meet the societal expectation to reduce the

negative impact on their well-being. This is evident in quotations such as; 'I tried to politely explain to her I teach at a university and cannot help'. "For me, I don't let the pressure get to me too much, I try to do my best'. 'If I can't do something, I tell them so I can feel free instead of worrying about what people will think about me because I am a "Doctor"'.

These statements support the idea that personal mind-set shifts can shape the well-being of employees [25,26]. From the perspective of the participants, personal mind-set shifts require building a strong sense of credibility, setting a 'bright rule' to clearly define boundaries and stating clearly what one can do and cannot do for others. This involves telling a story around one's strengths and what one can offer and the continuity of this practice can shift expectations and perceptions by establishing concise interpretations in one's mind to trigger the positive responses [6].

5. CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATION

This article has shown that how university lecturers in Ghana are perceived by Ghanaian society can create pressure amongst academics, affecting their well-being negatively. Societal expectations were rooted in sociocultural beliefs and linked to economic factors in a developing country context. The paper highlights the importance of these findings which are likely to be very different to developed countries such as the USA and in Europe. The authors recommend a mind-set shift on a wider level (amongst the society) and on an individual level (amongst academics) to bring expectations from both sides closer together. This can be done through education; engaging community talks on the pressures of societal expectations and demands to create awareness and observe cultural beliefs that impact the understanding of well-being issues. These initiatives could potentially reduce the pressure of unrealistic expectations on academics and other "knowledge workers".

CONSENT AND ETHICAL APPROVAL

As per international standard or university standard guideline participant consent and ethical approval has been collected and preserved by the authors. Issue of ethics in conducting this study was adhered to. Researchers adhered to high moral and ethical values, thus ensuring the protection and

promotion of rights of all participants. The aspect of confidentiality was also given optimum attention. In this case, pseudonyms were used to conceal the identities of the respondents and security was assured for any difficulties which may erupt afterwards.

COMPETING INTERESTS

Authors have declared that no competing interests exist.

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