

The Response of Academic Pharmacists to Poor Salaries in Nigerian Universities

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This paper describes different ways by which lecturers in schools of Pharmacy cope with low salaries in Nigeria. It is based on a semi-structured interview of 48 lecturers working in Schools of Pharmacy in Nigeria. This representative sample of lecturers yielded reports on about 18 different types of individual coping strategies. Most of these have a potential effect on teaching and research through reduced availability of staff. Activities related to teaching and research and other businesses outside teaching and research were mentioned most often. Allowances and *per diems* seem to be most favoured top regarding frequency and effectiveness followed by secondary jobs, private practice and subsistence agricultural practice. A few of the lecturers however admitted using public resources for private purposes. Individual coping strategies may lead to undesirable side effects for the learning process and delivery through a net transfer of resources (qualified personnel time and material resources) from the public to the private sector.

Keywords: Pharmacists; Universities; Poor salaries; Nigeria

INTRODUCTION

Approximately 70% of the academics employed by the nine recognised schools of pharmacy in

Nigeria are pharmacists, all with a basic degree in pharmacy and some possessing relevant postgraduate qualifications and registration with the Pharmacists Council of Nigeria (Erhun, 1989). The current salary of an academic pharmacist lies between \$500 and \$1000 (United States), considerably less than that available in the private sector. In addition, the various reforms imposed by recent Nigerian Governments, in response to both economic and political crises, have resulted in a significant decrease in the *per capita* public expenditure for education and a subsequent increase in the student-lecturer ratio (Lowenson, 1993; Roenen *et al.*, 1997). This has created a situation where academic pharmacists are both poorly paid and expected to work under increasingly difficult conditions, generated by a lack of resources. The current situation drives many academics to adopt a range of coping strategies in an attempt to satisfy the perceived gap in their career prospects and social status. Previous work has noted the time many Nigerian academicians, including academic pharmacists, spend in activities that are not part of their primary duties

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(Erhun, 1988). The crisis and decline of educational standard, the reforms in the educational sector and the emergence of unregulated private practice profoundly affect what lecturers in schools of pharmacy hope to get from their professional life and the way they try to achieve this. Many academics are aware that the actions they take, in response to the changing socio-economic and institutional environment, will often interfere with the overall functioning of the educational system. This study aims to describe the strategies that academic pharmacists adopt to cope with the poor salaries offered by Nigerian Universities. It is intended to use the information obtained to assist policy makers in Nigeria (and other developing countries) to develop strategies to promote job satisfaction and consequently reduce the level of a "brain drain" of pharmacists from these Universities.

MATERIALS AND METHODS

In November 1996, a random sample of lecturers from six Nigerian Schools of Pharmacy were invited to participate in the study while attending the annual national conference of the Pharmaceutical Society of Nigeria. All participants approached were full-time lecturers in departments of Pharmaceutics, Pharmaceutical Chemistry, Pharmacognosy, Pharmacology and Pharmacy Practice (including Clinical Pharmacy and Pharmacy Administration) and all agreed to take part. The hierarchy of progress of academic titles in Nigeria is as follows: Assistant lecturer: Lecturer II: Lecturer I: Senior lecturer: Reader or Associate Professor: Professor.

Two researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with academic staff to determine the age, family environment, work setting and professional experience of the individual. More specific questions then addressed their economic situation, what alternative sources of income they possessed, the coping strategies adopted and the beliefs associated with the impact of

these strategies on their work. Direct and indirect questioning addressed two motivational issues:

1. Why the interviewees deemed it necessary to develop coping strategies,
2. Why the lecturer remained in the public service.

In some cases, information was also elicited on other strategies used by lecturers in other Universities known to the interviewee. The interview questions did not systematically address discrepancies between the interviewee's professional role and their actual practice or between their social status expectations and their actual social position.

RESULTS

Of the 48 individuals interviewed 35 (73%) were males and 13 (27%) were females. Thirty (62.5%) of the respondents reside in urban areas while 14 (29.2%) reside in suburban areas. All the respondents possess a minimum of a Bachelor of pharmacy degree. Forty-three (89.6%) had either a Masters and/or Doctorate degree. The respondents' academic positions ranged from Assistant lecturer to Professor. The median age was 36 years.

Reasons for Remaining in Academia

Thirty-four (70.8%) of the respondents indicated that they were still in academia because of interest, 7 (14.6%) because of tenure and experience, 9 (18.7%) because of family commitments and 10 (20.8%) because they enjoyed the associated autonomy. (Table I).

Level of Satisfaction

Twenty (43.7%) of the respondents reported that they were generally satisfied with their work while 18 (37.5%) were undecided. Teaching was

TABLE I Location of respondents and reasons for remaining in academics

Reasons	Urban (n in %)	Semi-urban (n in %)	Total (n)*
Interest	21 (19.4)	11 (12.5)	32
Experience	4 (3.7)	2 (2.3)	6
Family	6 (7.3)	6 (4.7)	12
Autonomy	6 (7.3)	4 (3.9)	10
Job security	1 (2.4)	3 (8.6)	4
Challenges	15 (14.0)	8 (8.9)	23
Total	53	34	87

* Respondents chose more than one option.

considered to be the most important activity performed by 25 (52%) of the respondents, followed by research 9 (18.8%) and community service was ranked the least important 5 (10.4%). (Table II).

Profile of Coping Strategies

Eighteen (37.5%) of the lecturers interviewed reported that they lived solely on their official salaries, they either did not want to develop ways of earning more or did not need to do so. "I would rather not develop such strategies", said one; "because they take up so much time that they threaten family life and serious academic pursuit". The remaining 30 lecturers talked freely about what they did to cope with economic difficulties. The types of strategies mentioned are summarised in Table III, under three headings: extra income from non teaching sources, extra income directly related to professional teaching activities and support by religious bodies and family. Table III further indicates sources of income mentioned as being used by other lecturers in other Universities, but not used by

interviewees directly. For example in the case of private practice and private pharmacies, some of the lecturers said they lacked investment capital and they could not engage in these activities themselves. Others also reported the lack of time to effectively supervise such a business and some others considered these sources of income unacceptable.

Non Teaching/research Income

Extra income from activities outside the professional field cannot be ignored, especially in semi-urban areas where the "market" for private practice is relatively small. Examples are the Universities at Ile-Ife and Nsukka, which are situated in semi-urban environments. Non-teaching activities come in different varieties. This additional income ranged from half to three times the public salary. Eight lecturers (17%) mentioned that cultivating a piece of land near their residence enables them to escape buying food on credit in local shops. The non-teaching/research activities were said to interfere with professional work only in terms of number of hours.

Second Job Within Public Sector

Twenty lecturers (42%) reported that, as a complement to their principal work in the University, they took up part time lectureship positions or jobs in other Universities. This possibility for extra income within the University sector is legally encouraged. These activities were seen as a positive development for new

TABLE II Level of lecturers satisfaction with academic activities (n = 48).

Activities	V. satisfied	Satisfied	Undecided	Dissatisfied	V. dissatisfied
Research	2	3	8	1	1
Teaching	5	7	8	2	1
Community service	1	2	2	4	1
Total	8	12	18	7	3

TABLE III Sources of extra income and the number academic pharmacists that used the strategy

Sources of extra income (activity)	Classification (activity)	Examples (activity)	Mentioned as being used by interviewee (N)	Mentioned as being used by others (N)
Non academic	Agro-pastoral	Commercial farming	1	2
		Subsistence agriculture	9	
	Commercial	Food	1	
Manufactured products		2		
Service		3		
Academic	Secondary jobs in public sector	University	12	8
		Polytechnic	-	-
	Research grants	Teaching hospitals	-	-
		Supervision	4	6
	Premium and <i>per diems</i>	Incentives from projects/NGO	6	
		Teaching/attending work-shop	4	
	Private practice	Consultancies	13	6
		Research	5	4
		Private chemists	3	
		Private employment (locum)	2	3
		3	5	
Use of public resources	Cars/petrol	5	3	
	Administrative matters	2	1	
	Money	1	-	
	Accommodation/housing	3	2	
	Private practice within public facilities		1	
Social support	Gift/presents from students/parents	3	2	
	Church	2		
	Family	5	4	

schools of pharmacy, which were hitherto finding it difficult to attract lecturers for teaching duties, and with this arrangement they are now more readily available.

Allowances And *Per Diems*

Allowances and *per diems* seem to top all other extra income activities regarding frequency and effectiveness. One interviewee said he hoped that "they will not abolish seminars, for life would be a lot more difficult without the *per diems* they provide". Five lecturers (10%) said they earned up to a month's salary by teaching at a 4-day workshop for foreign agencies. Most of the lecturers seem to think these premiums or *per diems* are for activities within their job description and do not have a negative influence on their primary duties.

Research Grants

Eight percent of the respondents reported that research grants could serve as source of extra income, but it was not readily available locally and few lecturers actually benefited from this source. It was however expected to be a source of extra income in normal situations.

Private Practice

Seven (14.6%) of the interviewees said they were involved in private practice in a formal private drug store registered by another pharmacist. Private practice in all its forms was said to be financially quite rewarding, although to varying degrees. For instance some lecturers reported that a lecturer's monthly income could be doubled within 15 days of private practice whereas others estimated that this could be achieved within 72h of private practice especially in Lagos—the former federal capital city of Nigeria. A number of respondents mentioned the problems of competition for

working time but none of the interviewed lecturers expressed concerns about possible conflict of interest resulting from involvement of public servants in private practice. All the respondents were of the opinion that academic pharmacists should be allowed to register pharmacies, especially now that University curricula are designed to address practice problems. The justification was that lecturers need exposure in the various practice areas of the profession in order to adequately teach and train students. Presently the Pharmacists Council of Nigeria, which is the regulatory body for pharmacy in Nigeria, does not allow public service pharmacists to register pharmacies.

Gifts and Social Support

Gifts from parents of students, sometimes interpreted as a "petty form of corruption", were said to provide an effective source of income by a few lecturers. Others said such presents were too irregular to consider them as a real source of extra income. Beside gifts, one interviewed lecturer reported that the church supported him with money and three lecturers declared that they received regular food support from their extended families.

Private Use of Public Resources

Private use of public resources were quoted from using official cars for personal travel, taking stationery home for children and taking salary advances from the University. Besides the use of official vehicles and administrative materials, which was generally accepted by the lecturer as part of the job, the taking of money from the imprest account of the University was described in very negative terms. More generally all the lecturers denied using public service facilities for private purposes in any way. They reported that they neither produced nor sold lecture handouts

to students or used institution's equipment for private seminars.

Perception of Interference With Public Duties

Given the workload involved, these various individual strategies can be expected to interfere with the official work of the lecturers by diminishing the actual time they spent on their job. Indeed most of the interviewees acknowledged the negative impact of extra work on public sector activities in terms of decreased personnel availability, and consequently in terms of fatigue and lack of attention, for their work in their official capacity.

Motivational Issues

The main reason behind the effort to obtain an extra income was essentially to try to maintain an acceptable standard of living, despite low salaries and rising cost of living. Reference was made to food, water and electricity bills, which were becoming difficult to pay and the need to support extended family and payment of debts contracted in better times were clear motivating factors. Most respondents acknowledged that their income from private activities was more important than their salary income. Nevertheless, they identified themselves professionally as civil servants. Salary was clearly not the main motivator in remaining in the public service; rather the interviewees explained that public service guarantees job security, credibility and social contact. Most added that lecturing gives access to power centres and resources through which other coping strategies can be developed.

DISCUSSION

This exploratory study, using face-to-face interview method, provided insight into what may

be happening among academic pharmacists (lecturers) in Nigerian Universities as the government battles to sustain a credible educational system. The way lecturers cope with the difficult economic situation most often focuses on those activities that are in contradiction to the ideal of public service, for example, appropriation of public resources for private means, private practice and exploitation of students are activities which hamper accessibility and jeopardize equity (Bennet and Mill, 1994). However, the respondents identified no less than 18 different individual strategies. Most of these affect teaching, research and community service through reduced availability of resources.

More detailed investigation of the different coping strategies should lead to a typology based on documented rather than assumed impact and this would provide a basis for solving the problem of inadequate remuneration. A limitation of the present study is that interviewees such as those in the study cannot document actual practice or its effects. What they provide is information about the way pharmacy lecturers mentally construct the phenomenon of coping strategies, about their beliefs and experiences relating to various strategies and their views on compatibility of other activities with their public servant identities and their perception of what is less socially acceptable, rather than document actual practice or its side effects. One major track for interpretation of the data in this study can be drawn from the interviews in economic terms.

Economic Interpretation

Actors in institutions or organisations develop strategies in order to pursue their own interest (Crozier and Friedberg, 1980), which may be economic, intellectual, affective, power or prestige. In the interviews conducted in this

study, individual strategies are looked upon as ways to cope with a difficult economic environment. None of the interviewees, from the way the interviews were designed, proposed other explanations whether in terms of job satisfaction or career expectation. The explicit motive proposed consisted of the search for a decent standard of living. The connotation "acceptable standard of living" is heterogeneous and by no means universal among the lecturers, most of who practice in semi-urban and urban settings and normally engaged in extra income generating activities. This may suggest that the relation between income and actual living standard and coping strategies is not as straightforward as one might assume.

Various social, political and organisational factors contribute to shaping the complexity of professional identities. The professional role image of pharmacy lecturers is classified based on technical and service rather than self interest orientation, but it also includes expectation related to high social status, leading to value conflict in lecturers practicing in environments characterised by scarcity (Olweny, 1994).

The major implication of our findings is that extra income generating activities can be considered as emergent strategies, which if left unchecked may lead to uncontrollable and undesirable side effects for the educational system through a net transfer of resources from the public to the private sector (Olweny, 1994). Although these strategies may not be totally negative, there may be compensatory effects in terms of mobilization of additional resources where public funds are scarce. Some individuals' coping strategies can also have a stabilising effect on qualified personnel, allowing them to attain a standard of living which is closer to what they expected and thereby reducing the chances of such persons switching to the private sector and its attendant consequences on the educational system. The amount of time invested in private practices permits the

realisation of professional goals, which are blocked in the public service as a result of deteriorating working conditions. The response from the pharmacy regulatory and professional organisation is one of *laissez-faire laissez-aller*. This attitude can be explained in three ways. Firstly, if the effectiveness in economic terms of individual coping strategies indicated by the lecturers is even near to reality, most African countries do not have the financial capacity to increase salaries enough to compensate them in an effective way (Chernkovsky and Bayulken, 1995). Secondly, allowing the development of secondary activity is seen as a way of stopping the brain drain from the University system. Finally, powerful groups such as the pharmaceutical companies, urban elites and the senior academicians obtain advantages from the existing structure. However the unanswered question is "Does economic response to coping strategies make sense?"

The rationale for pharmacy lecturers developing side activities probably extends beyond the sole economic interpretation already provided. The presence and influence of role models and ethical rules could be felt through these interviews. In the climate of pessimism presently reigning in Nigeria, it makes sense to speculate that ethical rules determine what is socially acceptable for pharmacy lecturers, and they remain important to keep an ideal lecturer's behaviour from degenerating into a purely commercial outlook. This should be capitalised upon by strengthening the public interest role of the pharmacist who chooses to lecture and privileging coping strategies that are not in conflict with public service goals and delivery of pharmaceutical care through quality instruction to students and practitioners. It would, however, be an illusion to expect the ethical barriers to hold against increasingly economic hardship in the absence of appropriate mechanism ensuring that pharmacy lecturers' behaviour remain in line with the wider societal expectation and interest. Currently, neither the state nor the

professional associations seem able to play this role in Nigeria. In conclusion, the development of coping strategies is a major response of pharmacy lecturers to low salaries. The deeper study of their coping strategies would not only lead to a better understanding of the issues from a lecturer's perspectives, but also identify the structures which affect these strategies in the University system. In the prevailing adverse socio-economic environment, it is feasible to create conditions that allow individual pharmacy lecturer strategies to remain compatible with equity and quality while responding to their aspiration for survival, social status and professional satisfaction (Tumwine, 1992). This in turn should assist in the development of appropriate manpower policies to forestall an increased drain of pharmacists from the Universities to the Nigerian private sector and overseas.

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