

Psychosocial Work Environment and Employee Performance in Public Hospitality Establishments in Kenya

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Abstract

This study was to establish the effect of psychosocial work environment on employee performance in Public hospitality establishments in Kenya. Social cognitive theory of organizational management was adapted with descriptive and explanatory research designs. The target population was 312 employees out of which 173 formed the sample size. Purposive sampling selected the establishments while simple random sampling selected employees. Data was collected using structured questionnaires which were analyzed using descriptive and inferential statistics. Specifically, mean and standard deviation for descriptive and bivariate regression tested a null hypothesis on the effect of psychosocial work environment on employee performance. From the findings, psychosocial work environment factors were viewed positively with a mean rate >2 . The regression model had $R^2=0.224$ which implies psychosocial work environment explained 22.4% of the variance in employee performance. The analysis revealed psychosocial environment ($\beta=0.473$, $p=0.001$) affect employee performance ($p<0.05$). Consequently, psychosocial is an important predictor of employee performance hence hotel managers should develop mechanisms of listening to employees, enact policies to address employee complaints and introduce non-retaliatory policies. Psychosocial factors are frequently ignored in hospitality establishments yet they have the potential to directly affect employees.

Keywords: Employee performance, public hospitality establishments, psychosocial work environment

Introduction

Public service delivery remains the core mandate of any Nation. Through the relevant department, every government seeks to deliver services to the people in a manner that ensures effectiveness, efficiency and professionalism. The public sector is recognized as the world's largest service provider which, when improved is bound to impact positively on millions of people. In this era of liberalization, globalization and privatization, the public sector has attracted even more forms owing to competition from the private Sector.

One sector that has proven to be very critical in economic development in the contemporary society is the hospitality service sector. The novel Covid -19 has brought hospitality service provision into focus, particularly the role the public sector plays in service delivery (Melvin et al., 2020). Resulting from the realization that the public sector plays a critical role in governance, most countries, Kenya included, have undertaken reforms in the public sector aimed at improving service delivery to the public and also promoting good governance (Hope, 2012). Although these reforms are bound to improve service delivery to the public, evidence shows that employee willingness to collaborate is a key aspect of public service delivery (Campbell, 2018).

Employees are identified as valuable assets of companies, and account for the bulk of organizational performance (Elnaga & Imran, 2013). Employee performance therefore remains pivotal to an organization's accomplishments and disasters. In a service-based sector such as the public sector, customer satisfaction is a function of employee's performance. It is posited that in such sectors, employees are increasingly taking on the role of driving organizational



performance (Rosiek et al., 2016). Employee performance, defined as an employee's capacity to fulfill job duties and execute required tasks, is perceived to be a multi-component concept that amalgamates the process aspect of performance (Pradhan & Jena, 2017).

The public sector and in particular the hospitality sector, is a dynamic work sector that calls for employees to acclimatize and provide necessary support. Pradhan & Jena (2017) therefore, identify adaptive performance as another critical component of employee performance. Evidence shows that employees who achieve some degree of perfection in assigned tasks always seek to adapt their behavior and attitudes to varying job requirements (Huang et al., 2014). Moreover, it is postulated that high level adaptive performance enables employees to effectively handle volatile work circumstance such as being witnessed in this Covid- 19 era (Baard et al., 2014). The specific objective for this study was to determine the effect of the psychosocial environment on employee performance in public hospitality establishments.

Literature review

Social cognitive theory of organizational management

The social cognitive theory of organizational management proposed by Bandura in 1986 (Wood & Bandura, 1989) was employed to underpin employee performance. According to Bandura, social cognitive theory of organizational management is a model of reciprocal determinism in which cognitive, behaviour, other personal factors and the environment interact to influence each other in a bidirectional way. The theory therefore explains psychosocial functioning as causation that identifies development of cognitive, behavioural and social competencies; cultivation of beliefs in own capabilities; and enhancement of people's motivation as critical aspects to the organization (Bandura, 1988d).

Choice of the social cognitive theory of organizational management was informed by the knowledge that, public sector employees' performance is guided by an interaction between the employees cognitive, social and behavioural competencies; employees beliefs in their own capabilities; and motivation through goal systems. Indeed, it is argued that the public sector survival depends on innovation and that motivation for employees remains an important factor in overall public sector innovation (Halvorsen et al., 2005). Meanwhile, employees' cognitive and social competencies have been associated with the capability to innovate (Toner, 2011). The argument being made here is that the social cognitive theory of organizational management suitably explains the tripartite relationship expected between public sector employees' capabilities, cognitive and social competencies, and their innovativeness.

Psychosocial environment

Psychosocial environment in the context of work is perceived as a broad concept that, relates to the manner in which individuals experience and respond to their surroundings (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010). Jacobs et al. (2013) define the psychosocial environment as interpersonal and social interactions between individuals that are bound to affect behaviour and growth in the place of work. In essence, psychosocial environment encompasses elements such as nature and content of the work, work organization, and conditions and social relations under which the work has to be performed (Hansen et al., 2015).

Proponents of psychosocial work environment took on a psychological approach that focused on employee treatment, emotional effects of procedures, work tasks, and behaviour elicited among colleagues, supervisors, clients, and customers (Rugulies, 2019). According to Sauter et al. (1998) psychosocial factors, relate to job and work environment aspects like organizational culture or climate, interpersonal relationships at the workplace, roles, and, task design and content. Besides, psychosocial factors also extend to extra organizational



environment that includes domestic demands, and personality and attitudinal factors, that may lead to development of work place stress (Sauter, et al., 1998).

Evidence further shows that a work environment characterized with high job demands, low support from co-workers and supervisors, low procedural and relational justice, low control over the job and a high imbalance in effort reward is a predictor of stress related disorders, which is likely to be prevented by improving psychosocial work environment (Nieuwenhuijsen et al., 2010). Meanwhile, a stressful psychosocial work environment that raises effort-reward imbalance features in existing literature as a risk factor for alcohol dependence in men (Head et al., 2004). Psychosocial work characteristics such as influence at work, quantitative demands, developmental avenues, job insecurity, and social support by co-workers and supervisors have also been associated with severe depressive symptoms (Schaufeli et al., 2009).

The psychosocial work environment concept has gained more attention owing to the global spread of Covid-19. According to Meirun et al. (2020), Covid-19 has shown the vulnerability of spreading fear in people's minds owing to the weak health system. Poor psychosocial work environment has been associated with increased stress levels that contaminate in mental health problems (Stansfeld & Candy, 2006). According to Stansfeld and Candy (2006), psychosocial risks elicit psychological responses such as low motivation, low mood, anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, depression, and suicidal thoughts. Meanwhile, physical reactions such as fatigue, digestive problems, dermatological reactions, musculoskeletal disorders, loss of appetite and weight, headaches among others are also potential responses to psychosocial risks (International Labour Organisation, 2020). Behaviours such as increased use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco are identified as coping strategies mostly adopted.

Psychosocial environment and employee performance

Kagwi (2018) examined the influence of psychosocial factors on the employee performance in organizations. Kagwi anchored the study on Herzberg Hygiene Motivation Theory and Frederick Taylor scientific Management Theory. Using a descriptive research that relied on Microsoft excel for data analysis and bar charts, tables and pie charts for reporting results, Kagwi determined that Psychosocial aspects at the workplace contributed significantly towards organizational performance albeit, from a public service perspective. However, the study highlighted contextual, theoretical and methodological gaps. First and foremost, the context amalgamates a number of public service entities. Secondly, the Herzberg hygiene motivation theory is mostly suitable for motivation. Moreover, the descriptive nature of reporting results in tables and charts do not suit cause-effect studies as implied in Kagwi's study.

Meanwhile, Then et al. (2014) examined the longitudinal impact of psychosocial work conditions on dementia and cognitive functioning of workers. Relying on 17 studies of adequate quality, Then et al. found evidence showing that psychosocial conditions at work could have an impact on the risk of dementia and cognitive functioning of employees. Gitahi (2014) on the other hand used the context of commercial banks drawn from Nakuru town to explore the effect of psychosocial aspects on performance of the banks. Without being explicit on theories employed, Gitahi employed descriptive survey design and both descriptive and inferential approaches to show that psychosocial work environment strongly associated with employee performance. In another study, Charllotte (2018) utilized Kenya Prison context to analyze the effect of psychosocial environment on delivery of services by employees. Charllotte anchored her study on psychosocial stress theories, the Herzbergs hygiene/motivation theory and Frederick Taylor's scientific management theory employing descriptive survey research design to analyze data. Charllotte concluded that psychosocial



aspects of work environment were critical in service delivery rendered by employees of Kenya Prison.

Scholars such as Then et al. (2014), Gitahi (2014), and Charllotte (2018) in finding that psychosocial conditions contribute to performance, beefed up scholarship on existing knowledge pertaining to psychosocial working environment and employee performance. Then et al., (2014) for instance, used the systematic literature review approach that may not have addressed the problem in real time. Gitahi (2014) on the other hand used the commercial bank context which, is largely a private sector making it difficult to replicate the findings to the public sector. Charlotte (2018) used the Kenya Prisons context that although being a public entity, involves a disciplined force as opposed to the staff in the public hospitality sector. This discussion led to the postulating that:

H₀₁: Psychosocial work environment does not affect employee performance in public hospitality establishments in Kenya

Methods

Study was conducted in five public hospitality establishments in Kenya. Research designs were descriptive and explanatory. The target population was 312 employees derived from the five public hospitality establishments. The sample size calculator with a 95% confidence level was used to derive at the sample size of 173 and distributed as in table 1.

Table 1 Sample size distribution

| Hospitality Establishments | Target Population | Percentage | Sample |
|----------------------------|-------------------|---------------|------------|
| Establishment A | 92 | 29.41 | 51 |
| Establishment B | 87 | 28.10 | 49 |
| Establishment C | 49 | 15.69 | 27 |
| Establishment D | 43 | 13.73 | 24 |
| Establishment E | 41 | 13.07 | 23 |
| Total | 306 | 100.00 | 173 |

Purposive sampling selected five public hospitality establishments while simple random sampling selected employees. Data was collected using structured questionnaires. Face and content validity were determined by experts while reliability was tested using Cronbach's Alpha $\Rightarrow >0.70$ but may decrease to $\Rightarrow >0.60$ and increase up to ≥ 0.80 . The reliability achieved was .669 ($>.7$). Data was analyzed using descriptive statistics (mean and standard deviation) and bivariate regression to test the hypothesis.

Results and discussion

Descriptive statistics for psychosocial environment

Employees indicated their agreement or disagreement with seven statements used to measure psychosocial environment (figure 1). From the findings, 89% employees agreed that work was evenly distributed, that it was not emotionally demanding and does not put employees in emotionally disturbing situations. This implies that there could be fairness and equity in the distribution of work which support the findings of Ajala (2012) that in a hostile work environment, employees feel insecure about their actions as a result of hostility from management or other co-workers such as uneven distribution of tasks. Such hostility may present itself in the form of harassment and/or discrimination, exploitation, feeling coerced to work more hours or do favors against one's will, blackmailing and threats. If such situations are neglected, employees get emotionally drained which can affect their health and general well being and result in poor concentration and failure to achieve organizational goals.



With regard to trust, 92% agreed they trust information from management because it is not withheld. This supports Hassan et al. (2012) who revealed that trust-building interpersonal relationships between managers and workers positively lead to high productivity and organizational commitment. Managers should therefore disseminate necessary information to employees to build trust because it results in high productivity and makes it easy to achieve efficient and effective performance.

Similarly, 92% employees agreed they express views and feelings and develop skills because of support from seniors that creates a sense of belonging which improves self-esteem crucial for enhanced performance. When employees express their feelings, communication is enhanced, good working environment is achieved with little psychological effects affecting employees hence realization of efficiency and effectiveness in the workplace. Chandrasekar (2011) argues that employees and organizations whose performance are affected by workplace environments do not express their feelings and always complain about workplace discomfort and dissatisfaction.

On conflict between work and private life, 92% agreed that absence of conflict makes employees want to be in both places at the same time. The results present an impression of a good environment where relationships are easily built for the betterment of the organization. Further, 84% agreed that work doesn't drain energy and take too much of their time affecting private life. In situations of conflict, employees do not complete assignments, they experience insecurity and chances of sabotage rise. In support of these Purcell et al. (2009) observed that work life balance (WLB) is important in developing a performing culture as far as growth, customer service, productivity, quality, and ultimate contribution towards the value of the shareholders is concerned. Similarly, McClean and Collins (2011) opined that WLB initiatives increases employee effort and encourage a positive relationship that makes them work towards achievement of organizational goals. Further, Garbie (2014) assert that effective application of ergonomics achieves a balance between workers task and demands that eventually improve productivity, employee safety, physical and mental well-being and job satisfaction and enhanced performance.

Regarding physical exhaustion, 75% agree they don't get physically exhausted, irritable, tense and stressed from sleep related conditions such as bad/restless sleep, losing sleep, waking up several times and being unable to sleep back. As much as majority reflected an ideal situation, 25% who disagreed could face effects of sleep deficiency that can lead to derailment of body systems. Similarly, Boles et al. (2004), argue that when employees' are physically and emotionally satisfied, and have desire to work, their performance outcomes increases. Furthermore, Stansfeld & Candy (2006) lay bare the psychosocial risks that elicit psychological responses such as low motivation, low mood, anxiety, exhaustion, burnout, depression and suicidal thoughts. Meanwhile, physical reactions such as fatigue, digestive problems, dermatological reactions, musculoskeletal disorders, loss of appetite and weight, headaches are also potential responses to psychosocial risks (ILO, 2020). It is advisable to look out for behaviours such as increased use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco that have been identified as coping strategies.

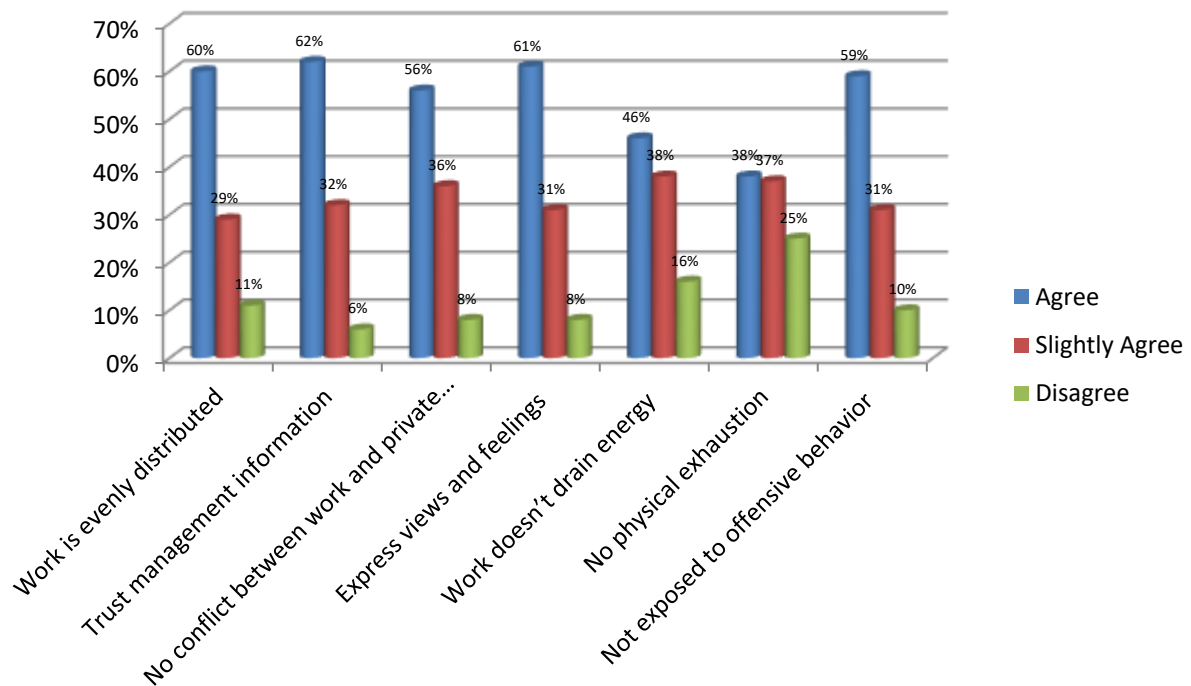


Figure 1: Percentages for psychosocial environment dimension

Responses indicated that 90% are not exposed to offensive behavior such as sexual harassment, threats of violence, physical violence or bullying at the workplace. The results indicate that a small percentage of 10% experience offensive behavior. According to Dollard & McTernan (2011) employees usually experience significantly higher stressors at workplace such as harassment, workplace bullying, and psychological demands. These stresses can directly influence employees' behaviour at work, where by the employee could develop negative attitude and thus leads to high turnover rates, frequent absenteeism, lack self-confidence and productivity which in turn could cause job dissatisfaction leading to workplace aggression (Ladebo et al., 2008). The presence of offensive behavior cannot be underestimated as there are chances of innocent employees being inducted or experiencing the same. It would be important to understand the kind of offensive behavior in order to curb it.

A study by Dorota et al. (2009) evaluated consequences of exposure of workplace aggression from co-workers and clients for both nurses and public service workers and pointed at adverse consequences of exposure of aggression to work place irrespective of its source. As a result, employees experiencing aggression are less satisfied with work, and showed symptoms of burn out and their general health was poorer. Psychosocial descriptive recorded a mean >2.0 which is reflective of employees appreciating the psychosocial work environment and see no problem.

Statistics in Table 2, show that data on psychosocial environment exhibited a distribution with mean of 2.42 and standard deviation .683 as determined by normal skewness values in the range [-3,3]. The mean affirmed that respondents agreed with elements of psychosocial environment which could affect employee performance. In addition psychosocial environment reliability results indicated that all the constructs measuring psychosocial environment were reliable with Cronbach's Alpha between .677-.748. The overall reliability was significant at .735 (>0.7).



Table 2: Descriptive statistics for psychosocial environment

| Statement | Mean | SD | Skewness | KurtosisA |
|---|-------------|-------------|----------|-------------|
| Work is evenly distributed, not emotionally demanding and doesn't put employees' in emotionally disturbing situations | 2.49 | .689 | 1.002 | .254 |
| I trust information that comes from management because important information is not withheld | 2.56 | .605 | 1.054 | .103 |
| No conflict between work-private life making me want to be in both places at the same time | 2.47 | .649 | .839 | .361 |
| I express my views and feelings and develop my skills because I get support from my seniors | 2.54 | .639 | 1.056 | .021 |
| My work doesn't drain my energy and take too much of my time that affects my private life | 2.29 | .733 | .524 | .980 |
| I don't get physically exhausted, irritable, tense and stressed from sleep related conditions | 2.12 | .789 | .225 | 1.358 |
| I have not been exposed to offensive behavior | 2.48 | .680 | .959 | .286 |
| Average response score | 2.42 | .683 | | .735 |

Employee performance

Employee performance, the dependent variable, had a total of seven statements measuring the variable. From the responses 63% agree they complete tasks on time, 27% slightly agree and 10% disagree. Majority employees accounting for 52% agree they work beyond normal working hours, 33% slightly agree while 15% disagree. With regard with meeting work targets as per schedule, 62% agree, 26% slightly disagree while 12% disagree. Pertaining to completion of assignments using available resources, 61% agree, 30% slightly agree and 9% disagree. Concerning productivity, 49% agree productivity is high as compared to their colleagues, 35% slightly agree while 16% disagree. Responses indicated that 63% do not need supervision to complete tasks, 28% slightly agree while 9% disagree. Finally, 61% agree they produce neat and accurate work, 30% slightly agree while 9% disagree. The results are illustrated in Figure 2.

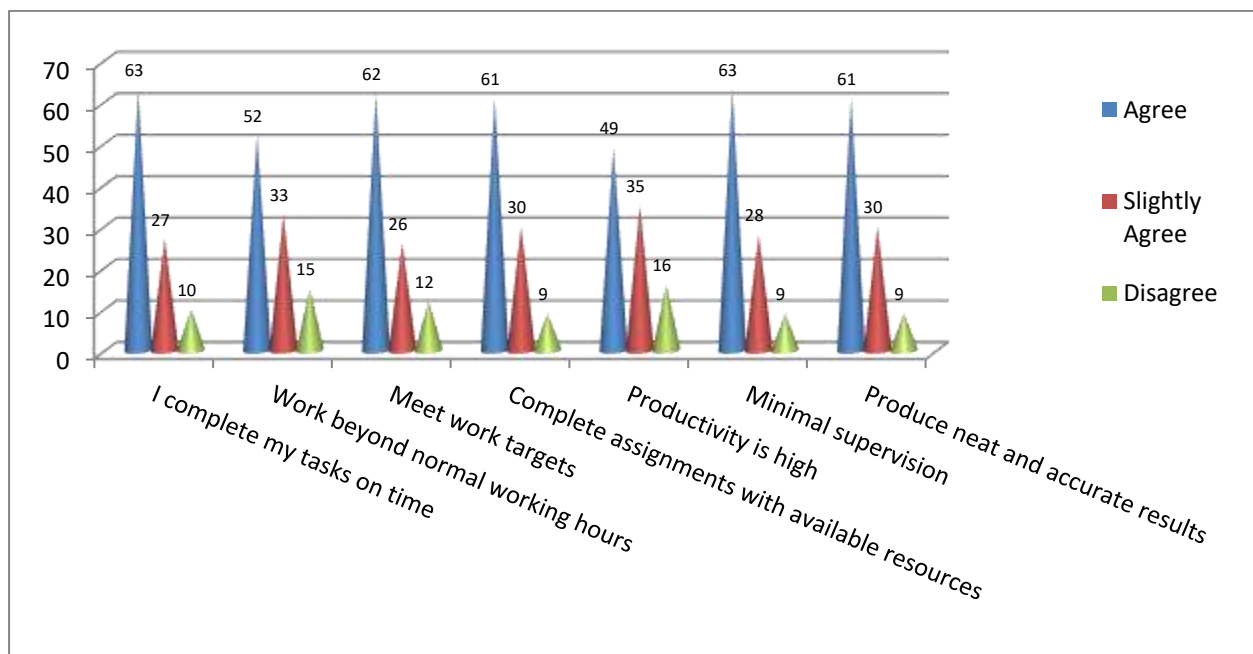


Figure 2: Percentages for employee performance

Descriptive statistics in Table 3 indicate that the overall mean response score was $M=2.47$ and the standard deviation of $.686$ which affirmed employees were consistent in showing agreement with aspects of performance. The distribution of data was normal with skewness values in the



range [-3,3] and kurtosis showing the distribution was mesokurtic implying normal distribution. Additionally, the reliability results of employee performance constructs were reliable with Cronbach’s Alpha between .671 - .726 thus, overall significant reliability of .733 (>0.7).

Table 3: Descriptive statistics for employee performance

| Statement | Mean | SD | Skewness | Kurtosis | A |
|---|------|------|----------|----------|------|
| I complete my tasks on time | 2.52 | .679 | 1.104 | .038 | .682 |
| I work beyond normal working hours | 2.38 | .726 | .721 | .775 | .726 |
| I meet work targets as per schedules | 2.50 | .699 | 1.066 | .184 | .671 |
| I complete assignments with available resources | 2.53 | .649 | 1.059 | .008 | .678 |
| My productivity is high as compared to others | 2.32 | .740 | .593 | .957 | .712 |
| I do not need supervision to complete my tasks | 2.54 | .659 | 1.111 | .054 | .719 |
| I produce neat, accurate work with dependable results | 2.53 | .649 | 1.059 | .008 | .715 |
| Average responses | 2.47 | .686 | | | .733 |

Bivariate linear regression

The model summary in table 4 yielded $R=.473$, $R^2=.224$ and adjusted $R^2=.219$. This implies that employee performance was explained by 22.4% of psychosocial work environment factors.

Table 4: Model summary^b

| Model | R | R Square | Adjusted R Square | Std. Error of the Estimate | Change Statistics | | | | Sig. Change | F Durbin-Watson |
|-------|-------------------|----------|-------------------|----------------------------|-------------------|----------|-----|-----|-------------|-----------------|
| | | | | | R Square Change | F Change | df1 | df2 | | |
| 1 | .473 ^a | .224 | .219 | .37608 | .224 | 43.536 | 1 | 151 | .000 | 1.638 |

a. Predictors: (Constant), Psychosocial environment

b. Dependent Variable: Employee performance

The ANOVA output on table 5 affirmed that employee performance regressed on psychosocial work environment was a fitting model. The regression coefficient was different from zero ($F_{6, 158} = 43.536$, $p < 0.05$).

Table 5: ANOVA^a

| Model | | Sum of Squares | Df | Mean Square | F | Sig. |
|-------|------------|----------------|-----|-------------|--------|-------------------|
| 1 | Regression | 6.158 | 1 | 6.158 | 43.536 | .000 ^b |
| | Residual | 21.357 | 151 | .141 | | |
| | Total | 27.514 | 152 | | | |

a. Dependent Variable: Employee performance

b. Predictors: (Constant), Psychosocial environment

Hypothesis testing

Results on table 6 on coefficients of correlations that psychosocial environment do not affect employee performance was rejected ($p=0.001$, < 0.05).

Table 6: Coefficients^a

| Model | Unstandardized Coefficients | | Standardized Coefficients | t | Sig. | Correlations | | | Collinearity Statistics | |
|--------------------------|-----------------------------|------------|---------------------------|-------|------|--------------|---------|------|-------------------------|-------|
| | B | Std. Error | Beta | | | Zero-order | Partial | Part | Tolerance | VIF |
| 1 (Constant) | 1.328 | .176 | | 7.533 | .000 | | | | | |
| Psychosocial environment | .473 | .072 | .473 | 6.598 | .000 | .473 | .473 | .473 | 1.000 | 1.000 |

a. Dependent Variable: Employee performance

However possible reasons for these results could be attributed to low expectations of employees who apparently could be satisfied with the environment because they have no otherwise. On



the other hand, employees could be satisfied with the psychosocial environment as the establishments are owned and managed by the government and may not be experiencing inadequacies that arise from psychosocial factors. However, these findings contrast Bushiri (2014) and Budie et al. (2019) who found a direct effect of psychosocial environment on employee performance. And an attractive and comfortable work environment provides a condition for employees to perform their job effectively, making best use of their knowledge, skills, competences and resources (Bushiri, 2014). Work environment satisfaction is of major importance for organizations, as it affects productivity and hence organizational performance (Budie et al., 2019). The scenario may necessitate further research using other public service sectors and population.

Employees were further asked to mention other psychosocial environmental factors that affect their performance in the work place. From the responses most employees indicated the need for spiritual and psychological support. When asked to suggest ways in which performance can be improved to mitigate against psychosocial effects, they suggested having rehabilitation of staff for drugs and alcohol and giving employees equal opportunities

Conclusion

Although psychosocial environment was viewed by majority as not affecting employee performance, the respondents who felt otherwise necessitate recommendations to improve the environment. First, management should have confidential complaints desk and suggestion boxes for employees to vent their frustrations especially with offensive behavior and enable employees to freely air their views. This component will be helpful in building trust between the management and staff, creating an environment of confidence for improved productivity and performance. Secondly, public service working hours should be adhered to avoid employees particularly working for about twelve hours which affects the balance of their work-private life and consequently their efficiency and effectiveness. The long working hours can also lead to exhaustion and fatigue that affects performance. Lastly, the management should have mechanisms for equitable distribution of work to avoid emotionally disturbing situations.

Employee complaints policy can be developed to provide employees an avenue to channel personal grievances. The policy can outline a step by step procedure of raising and possibly resolving complaints. This policy will deter irresponsible acts and deeds of employees against each other and will provide a good psychosocial environment where employees concerns will be handled professionally. Non-retaliatory policies can be enacted to protect employees who report complaints against victimization from management and co-employees. This may reduce psychosocial effects in the workplace, particularly offensive behavior and potentially improve interpersonal relationships.

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