UNDERSTANDING WORK RELATED STRESS AND SUBSTANCE USE AMONG CEMETERY WORKERS OF THE ETHEKWINI MUNICIPALITY

By

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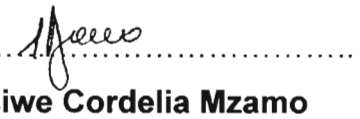
DECLARATION

I declare that this thesis is my own work. It is being submitted for the degree of the Masters in Health Promotion, School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu Natal. It has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any other university.



Sibusisiwe Cordelia Mzamo

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LAZARUS'S TRANSACTIONAL MODEL

ABSTRACT

An exploratory study was conducted to understand work related stress and substance use among the cemetery workers of the Ethekwini Municipality Anecdotal evidence suggested that in order to cope with the work related stress, this group of workers used substances like dagga and alcohol to cope with the stressors.

A qualitative study was done in which focus group discussions were used to understand the cemetery workers' stressors and coping strategies with particular interest in the use of substances. A purposive sampling technique was used and six cemeteries out of twelve within the Ethekwini Municipality were chosen. All the workers in these cemeteries performed similar duties. The participants were on permanent contracts and were mainly adult males, with only a few female workers. They were from Indian and African ancestry.

Thematic content analysis was used to explore their stressors and coping strategies. The cemetery workers' stress revolved around the intense and strenuous nature of their work with special reference to the exhumation of graves. Organisational structures and management practices that allowed for inadequate communication and little participation in the making of decisions, impacted negatively on their job satisfaction. The stresses were managed by a general acceptance of their working conditions, and the use of substances like dagga and alcohol during working hours.

The data suggested that the stressors would be lessened if attention is paid to the improvement of communication between the participants and management, and to allow for a more participatory decision making, regarding aspects that directly influenced their daily activities. Proper induction and selection procedures

are needed, and health promotion activities are needed on the dangers of substance use and healthy stress management strategies.

GLOSSARY

Dagga: This is the natural growing unprocessed plant which is smoked and is believed to have medicinal benefits. It also acts like a tranquiliser. It is also termed marijuana.

Exhumation: The process of digging up the grave, where someone has been buried irrespective of the time frame. It can be a day or month or years. This is usually done at the request of the family, police or any authority that has been granted permission to do so by the authorities. It can only be performed by the specially trained group of cemetery workers.

Exhumer: A specially trained cemetery employee who is tasked with performing exhumation of graves. These employees will rotate in all cemeteries where their services are needed.

Grave: Is a hole dug to bury a person in a designated area which complies to the Cemeteries and Crematorium Act.

Grave digger: Term used in the Ethekwini Municipality to define the person employed to dig graves or prepare graves in advance for the burial of a person.

Grave recycling: A term used in the Ethekwini Municipality to describe the grave that is ten years or older and has not been purchased by anyone. Due to shortage of burial space the next person is buried together with the old remains of the previous person. It is posed as new. The old remains are buried underneath and covered with sand.

Heat stress policy: This is a policy which governs the protection of employees from dangers of extreme heat by monitoring the temperatures and allowing temporary work cessation during extremely high temperatures.

Muti: This a term used to describe non-Western medicines or traditional medicine.

Pauper burial: Term used by the cemetery workers to describe the burials of people without their families. These may not necessarily be the homeless. It happens when the body has not been claimed by anyone after a certain period of time. The burial costs are borne by the government via the undertakers.

Protective clothing: Gear which according to the Occupational Health and Safety Act 95 of 1993 is supposed to be issued to the employee at no cost to him /her by the employer to protect him/her from harm during execution of their duties.

Sand rash: This a type of a common rash found in employees within the Municipality and they associate it with working with sand although this has not been proven as it occurs in employees who do not work with sand as well.

Sheeben: An informal township place which sells liquor, usually unlicensed. Sometimes called a tavern.

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 BACKGROUND

Work related stress has been an area of research interest over the past 50 to 60 years with intense interest since the mid 1970's (Sparrius, 1992). Stress is a common occurrence in most work places and everyone in the workplace is affected by stress. No one is immune to its effects (BFAWU Guide to work related stress, n.d.)

The World Health Organisation (WHO), Geneva viewed stress as the second highest cause of ill health and differentiate between stress that can be considered to be normal, and stress that is viewed as intense, continuous or repeated to the extent that the individual is unable to cope (Business Times, 2003). According to Whitehall (2000), one out of five workers in the United Kingdom reported feeling extremely stressed by their work. In an article that was submitted by a human resources consulting and placements company to the Sunday Tribune (2003), it was reported that work related stress is experienced by a large number of employees across all job categories in South Africa.

According to (Leat, 2001), anxiety and stress among workers were found to be linked to work overload, long hours, and a sense of lack of control over the work place, deadlines, and understaffing. However, the National Institute for the Occupational Safety and Health in South Africa,(S.A) have found some jobs to be more stressful than others. They listed manual labour as the number one in their top twelve most stressful jobs.

In this study the focus will be on the working conditions and related stress of cemetery workers, classified according to job categories, as manual labourers.

It is conceived that cemetery workers have stressful working conditions for various reasons. They have very long working hours and also work shifts over weekends and on public holidays. Because of an increase in HIV/AIDS related deaths (Mlaba, 2004) more burials take place than before and thus more graves have to be dug. Workers themselves are affected by HIV (Grootboom, 2005) and this might lead to absenteeism with the result that the remaining workers need to cope with an increased workload as they need to complete the tasks at hand. Peterson, Nicholas, McGraw, Englert & Blackman (2002), indicated that numerous studies have identified those tasked with handling human remains to be at risk of suffering from various stress related symptoms, as working with human remains is generally unpleasant.

The newspaper Isolezwe (2004), quoted an employee from one of the Ethekwini Cemeteries as saying: *"We feel bad about the situation where we have to recycle graves and find incomplete decomposed bodies and human remains"*. The person claimed further that according to him the body of a dead person should be respected. He added that this *"bad feeling"* does not leave him, even when he is at home he finds himself thinking about it and sometimes it just surfaces without consciously thinking about it. He further said they are tired of recycling graves. This cemetery worker questioned why new land was not purchased for this purpose.

He also stated that they do not have adequate protective clothing as they have to *"breathe in the dust"*. These sentiments expressed by this worker is supported by George & Jones (2002) who argued that what happens at or after work can affect the person's attitude, behaviour and performance on the job as well as general well-being.

Against this background it can be expected that all these factors might result in work related stress among cemetery workers. High levels of absenteeism have been noted among cemetery workers and reports have been received about substance use such as alcohol and dagga during working hours (Cloete, 2003). It is not clear how the workers appraise the stress or cope with it, nor is the extent of substance use clear. However, a general increase in the number of Ethekwini Municipal employees who sought help from psychologists were noted (Cloete, 2003).

The municipality responded to stress in the workplace by the allocation of a budget of R250 000 for the treatment of post traumatic stress disorder as this condition is not compensated for according to the current labour practice.

This study will explore those stressors that are particular to the cemetery workers. The information gained will help in understanding the uniqueness of this group of workers and highlight similarities with other manual labourers. The contribution that will be made by this research will assist in formulation of guidelines for appropriate interventions for the cemetery workers.

Previous research indicated that prolonged experience of stress in the work place can have high financial implications for the institutions. Workers may contract heart diseases which make workers take prolonged time off from work. While moderate levels of stress leads to minor ailments and bouts of absenteeism which imply hidden costs to the organizations (Hunsunkar, 2001). Understanding of these stressors and how they affect the worker may help with a deeper understanding of other problems that this type of worker might experience.

It is envisaged that the findings of the study will benefit the Ethekwini Municipality with specific reference to cemetery workers in providing a safer working environment in general, which in turn will enhance the productivity and the general well-being of cemetery workers. It is hoped that a reduction in the number of employees referred to the employee assistance programme for alcohol and drug rehabilitation will be made possible through a better understanding of cemetery workers and effective interventions. The results could also be used to update the pre-placement questionnaire with regards to stress related issues.

For example, questions could be included to screen applicants on stress coping skills and previous exposure to stressful conditions. This information would enable an improved placement profile for the prospective employee, an aspect stressed by Cooper, Dewe, & O'Discoll (2001), and Ivancevich (2000).

1.2 PROBLEM STATEMENT

No similar study has been conducted in this municipality, while cemetery workers had been employed for decades. It is also envisaged that they will be employed in the future (Mlaba, 2005).

In light of the various problems among cemetery workers i.e. substance abuse and high levels of absenteeism, it is expected that they experience high levels of stress (Cloete, 2003). It is however important to understand their experiences of stress, as well as the coping strategies they employ to deal with stressors. This understanding is a prerequisite for the development of prevention interventions among cemetery workers.

1.3 AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to understand stress and coping strategies among cemetery workers of the Ethekwini Municipality with a view to develop recommendations for the effective management of stress.

1.3.1 Objectives:

- To identify the specific stressors of cemetery workers;
- To explore the experience of work related stress among the workers;
- To explore stress coping strategies with specific reference to use of substances;
- To develop recommendations for improving working conditions of cemetery workers with regards to work stressors.

1.4 ETHICAL ISSUES

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Ethekwini Municipality. The proposal was also submitted to the University of KwaZulu-Natal's Ethical Committee for approval. All participants who participated in the study did so on a voluntary basis and signed an informed consent form after the purpose of the study was explained to them. The following aspects were attended to:

- Confidentiality was maintained as no individuals were identified.
- Informed consent was sought prior to the study and written consent was obtained.
- The research purpose of the study was fully explained.
- Respondents were assured that they may withdraw from the study at any time.

- Results would be made available to all participants who have an interest in the data. Details are stated in depth in Chapter Three.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW

In this chapter an overview of the literature pertaining to stress and coping strategies are presented. Stress is a term used to cover all problems that arise out of the physical and psychological reactions seen as challenges or threats to the well-being and with which the individual seems unable to cope (Tyson &York, 2000). How one is affected by stress depends on the personality traits of the individual and perceptions regarding the stressful event. Self-efficacy has been named to play a major role in an individual's ability to appraise and control stress (Cook, 2002). People, who are confident about their ability to influence events and situations, experience less stress. This confidence is strengthened when a person has experienced the same stressor previously and was able to deal with it successfully. Hence the same stressors may manifest differently for different people (Schaubroeck & Merritt, 1997; Wayne, 2003).

2.1 THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK OF THE STUDY

Stress is a widely used term. It means different things to different people. It is a normal reaction to life and the exposure to stress is one of the most common human experiences (Hanson, 2002). There has been some confusion regarding the definition of stress because of its broad application in different disciplines such as the medical, behavioural and social sciences (Abouserie, 1996; Cooper *et al*, 2001).

Stress can broadly be defined as a negative emotional experience that is accompanied by biochemical, physiological, cognitive and behavioural effects that are directed at challenging the stressful event or at accommodating its effects (Baum, 1990).

Current understanding of stress is informed by the work of Walter Cannon, Hans Selye and by the work of Lazarus, who emphasised the psychological factors absent from the previous understandings of stress (Taylor, 1999).

Walter Cannon described the fight-or-flight response in 1932 (as cited in Taylor, 1999). He argued that when a threat is perceived, physiological arousal occurs and the person is motivated via the sympathetic nervous system and the endocrine system. Through the physiological response the person is motivated to attack the threat or to flee, thus enabling a rapid response to deal with the threat. Should the person be unable to fight or flee, and therefore be exposed to prolonged stress, the state of physiological arousal may continue and ultimately lead to health problems.

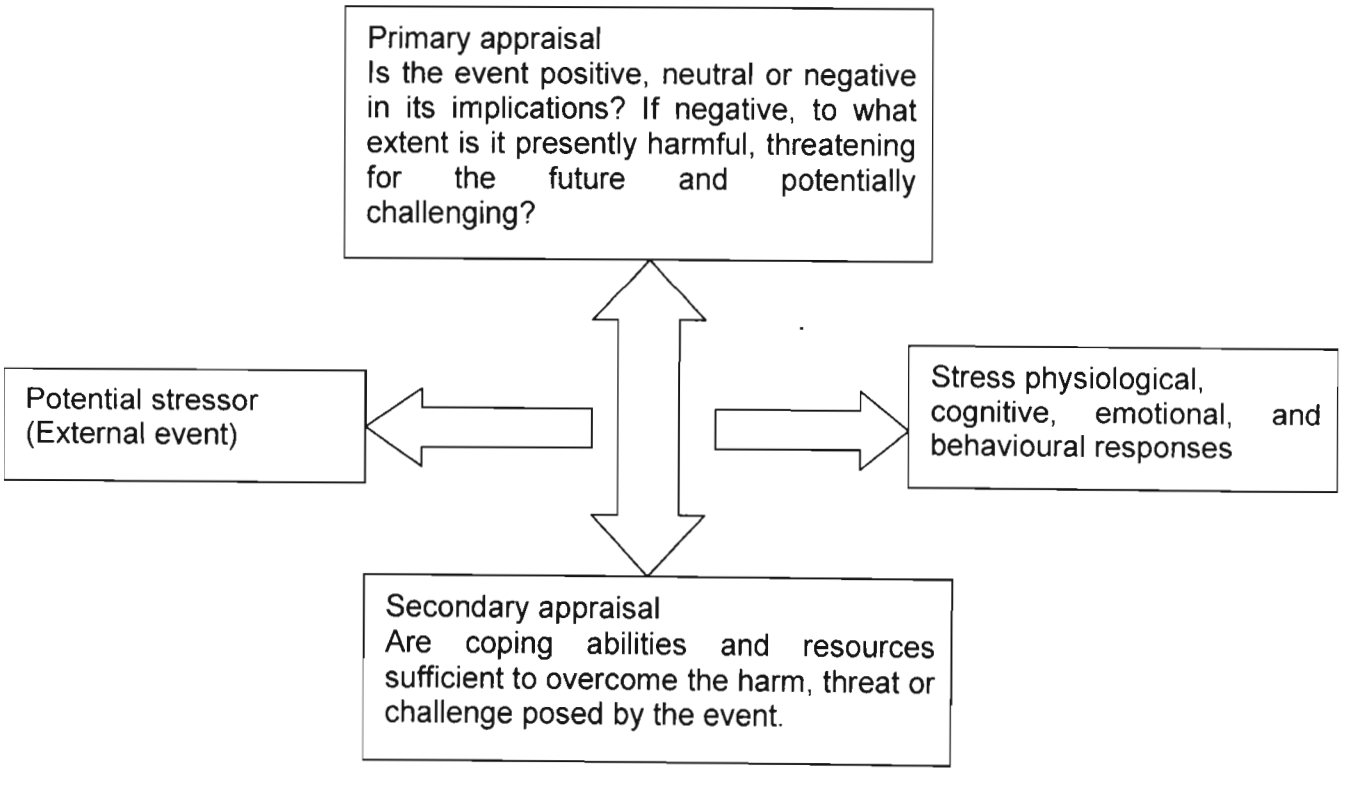
According to Hans Selye, a pioneer in stress research, prolonged stress followed a certain pattern and from these observations the concept of the general adaptation syndrome was developed in 1956 and 1976 (as cited in Taylor, 1999). While Cannon's work explored adreno-medullary responses to stress, Selye's work explored adreno-cortical responses to stress. This syndrome consisted of three stages namely:

a. *Alarm stage*: The organism becomes motivated to challenge the threat. A physiological reaction follows after perceiving stressors.
b. *Resistance stage*: The organism is directed at coping with the threat through a confrontation.
c. *Exhaustion stage*: This occurs if the organism is unable to overcome the threat and depletes its physiological resources in the process of trying to overcome the threat.

Selye argued that the repetition of the third stage or prolonged exhaustion was responsible for the physiological damage that made stress-related diseases possible. While Selye laid the foundations for the stress-illness relationship, this model was criticised for its lack of attention to the psychological appraisal of events (Lazarus and Folkman, 1984).

Lazarus, who is viewed as the chief promoter of the psychological perspective of stress, argued strongly that stress was the result of a person's appraisal processes. When a person is confronted with a new or challenging event, the situation is appraised and judgements are made whether the resources available would enable the management of the stress or not. Stress should therefore not be looked at in isolation, but should be studied in relation to different factors such as the environment, and be seen as a transaction process between the individual and the environment (Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Taylor, 1999). Lazarus' well known Transactional Model of stress (1984) can be viewed in Figure 1.

Figure 1: Lazarus' Transactional Model of Stress (1984).



Primary Appraisal.

The primary appraisal occurs when an event is perceived as stressful by the individual. This appraisal is based on past experience with the management of an event of this nature and its consequences. The positive appraisal is made when the experiences are viewed as positive with no negative effects. For example the work in a cemetery can be appraised as positive in the light of a 40% unemployment rate in South Africa (Sunday Tribune, 2005) Being employed is viewed against being unemployed. A neutral appraisal is made to a threat that has been experienced before but with no severe negative effects.

The cemetery workers might initially experience stress when opening up old graves, but because they have done this repeatedly and have not suffered severe consequences, it might be perceived as a neutral threat. On the other hand a negative appraisal is made when a person has knowledge of the severity of the event in terms of the seriousness of the harm and threat, as well as the lack of coping mechanisms available. A person with a lack of job skills, who has experienced being dismissed before, might experience negative stress when the possibility exists of losing his/her job.

Secondary Appraisal.

While primary appraisal happens, the secondary appraisal is initiated. This is mainly to assess the person's ability to cope with the perceived threat and resources available to overcome the threat. Where there are enough resources, the threat is minimised and where coping skills are good, there will be minimum stress. There needs to be a balance between primary and secondary appraisal. The potential responses to stress could be many and of a psychological, physiological, or behavioural nature.

Stress is thus about opportunities and threats. It is about how people perceive and construct it, as well as their abilities to cope with it. This

implies that the same stressful experience might have different meanings to different people, thus being highly individualistic (Wayne, 2003). It may have either positive or negative effects. Stress can serve to increase productivity and trigger new ideas, but prolonged and severe stress can result in poor performance, irritability and ill health (Cook, 1997; Rowe, 2000; Wayne, Lehman, & Bennet, 2002). The prolonged result of stress might be minor ailments, serious illnesses like heart disease, and or social problems.

2.2 STRESS AND COPING

Coping is considered as the way in which people deal with threats and its emotional consequences (Taylor, 1999).This process is also highly individual in the sense that threats affect people in different ways. Some events may be quite stressful for one person and not for the other (Wayne, 2003). It seems that limited information exist as to how individuals cope and about factors that are relevant in coping (Rowe, 2000). Coping should be viewed as a process that takes place over different stages and time (Cooper *et al.*, 2001).

When coping is viewed in accordance with the transactional theory, the interaction between the person and the environment should be considered. Coping styles are general behavioural tendencies to deal with stressful events in a specific way. These strategies refer to the specific efforts which can be either behavioral or psychological. Coping strategies are behaviors used consciously or unconsciously in an organized way to protect the self from the demands of the environment. Distinction is difficult to make in practice, since the term strategy assumes a degree of abstraction, introspection and verbal fluency (MacArthur & John, 1999).

Many scientists have studied the different behaviors used by people who find themselves faced with difficulties or diseases. Difficulties

have been encountered due to the number of approaches people use in coping. This has led to the inability to arrive at a global and comprehensive view on how individuals act in stressful situations (Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002). These different responses have been labeled broadly as coping behaviors and are associated with the work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) within the framework of the Transactional Theory of stress as depicted in Figure 1.

In an attempt to classify these behaviors, taxonomies of coping were developed. The taxonomies of coping strategies attempt to classify the diverse behavioral responses as processes closely related to the context in which the problem appears (Cox, Griffiths, & Gonzales, 2000).

The first process is what a person actually thinks and does in a stressful encounter. The second process is context dependent, in the sense that it is influenced by the particular encounter or appraisal of what initiated it, and by the resources available to manage the particular encounter. Thirdly, coping as a process should be defined as *"independent of outcome"*. This implies that it is not influenced by the success of the strategy. There is a comprehensive taxonomy, which considers coping, as a *"problem solving process"* Thus coping is not a trait, but rather a constantly changing state that evolves according to current demands on the individual's relationship with his or her environment.

As Lazarus and Folkman (1984) indicated, coping takes into account the efforts required to manage the stressful demands regardless of the demands. The quality of a strategy and its effectiveness and suitability is determined solely by its effects in a given situation and in the long-term. It must be noted that there is a difference between coping behaviors and strategies. Coping behaviors are the observable units of quantifiable behavior that individuals use consciously or

unconsciously to protect themselves from the demands of their situation or environment.

On the other hand, coping strategies can either be viewed as problem-based coping or emotional based coping. Problem based coping behavior is directed at the manipulation or changing of the problem, while emotion based coping is an attempt to regulate the emotional responses elicited by the problem (Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002; Rowe, 2000).

The predominance of one strategy over the other is determined in part by personal style and the type of stressful event. Some people cope better than others. People tend to employ problem-focused coping when dealing with potential controllable problems such as work-related problems. Whereas stressors perceived as less controllable, like health problems, prompt more emotion focused coping strategies (Cox *et al.*, 2000; Rice 1997; Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002).

It must be noted that people engage in active coping strategies, which are either behavioral or psychological responses designed to change the nature of the stressor itself or how one thinks about it. Some people deal with a threatening situation by an avoidant (minimising) coping style whereas others use a confrontational (vigilant) coping style by gathering information or taking direct action. Avoidant coping strategies lead people into activities like alcohol use, or mental states, like withdrawal. These keep them from directly addressing stressful events (MacAthur & John, 1998).

2.3 STRESS AND HANDLING OF HUMAN REMAINS

Due to lack of literature on the cemetery worker per se, jobs that are similar have been considered like coroners, the police, fire and emergency rescue service workers, nurses, and mortuary attendants. For people tasked with working with human remains, the first year of

working in these conditions seemed to be very taxing. Stressors like the smell and touch of human remains were mentioned as stressors and impact on the workers' capacity to do the work (Green, 2001; Lee, 2002).

Peterson *et al.,* (2002) concurred in their study among mortuary workers following the September 11 events that those who were tasked with the handling of human remains were at risk of symptoms related to post traumatic stress disorder and other psychological sequellae. Cullen (2003) indicated that even for cemetery workers who had been involved in this kind of work for extended periods of time, the accidental discovery of a skeleton was a frightening experience. Hammond and Brooks (2001) and also Weaver (1999) stressed the need to support people who handle human remains.

Because of a lack of literature regarding cemetery workers, studies conducted among the police who were involved in the handling of human remains over years were investigated (Green, 2001). While the handling of human remains is a frequent occurrence and part of normal routine, it had negative emotional consequences for the officers. This resulted in the adoption of a *"tough guy"* façade as a method of tolerance. Some scholars refer to this as "*hardiness"* as it is thought to buffer the adverse effects of stressors (Rowe, 2000). This does not mean that there was no permanent damage to their mental health. Most of the police officers who were involved in the study underwent successful psychiatric treatment, while others retired on the grounds of medical disability. Green (2001) stated that all human beings can reach or exceed a saturation point when they are continually exposed to highly inflammatory emotional and sensory stimuli that are associated with death. According to Green (2001) these circumstances subjected the workers to intense emotions. Some coping strategies they used included dissociative amnesia. This is when a person erases from memory whatever he/she witnessed as if it did not happen. It can be a voluntary or non-voluntary process.

Green (2001) also found that smell, sounds, tastes and touch memories (flashbacks) caused psychological distress. These could manifest in dreams and also mood disorders. These findings suggest that anyone who is tasked with the handling of human remains is susceptible to some form of stress, which can either manifest psychologically or physically. It is therefore expected that the cemetery workers experience stress as they cannot be excluded from these reactions.

2.4 STRESS AND SUBSTANCE ABUSE

Stressful events increase the vulnerability of an individual to initiate, prolong and continue the use of substances like alcohol and dagga (Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Hanson, 2002). During all negative experiences, certain regions of the brain show increased levels of the corticotrophin releasing factor (CRF), which is normally found in the brain to initiate our biological responses to stressors.

It has been found that most drugs that are abused increase CRF levels. This suggests a neurobiological connection between stress and substance abuse (Hanson, 2002). Social drinkers and problem drinkers often believe that alcohol consumption will help to reduce their stress (Brown, Goldman, Inn & Anderson, 1980 as cited by Sayette, 1993; Cooper *et al.*, 2001; Frone, 1999, 2003). Tobacco and/or alcohol are the popular drugs that are often abused in the workplace (Bernadine, 2003). Stress is a major contributor to relapse after periods of abstinence from alcohol, tobacco or other drugs (National Drug Institute, 2002).

Certain studies have concurred with the fact that employees in lower echelons and high-risk jobs were more likely to use substance than their counterparts. To be specific, the National Institute of Occupational Safety and Health SA., studied stress and its relation to work. They came up with the top twelve most stressful jobs (Wayne *et*

al., 2002) of which manual labour was listed as the most stressful job. Cemetery workers can be considered to fall into this category as they are manual labourers (Wayne *et al.*, 2002).

In a permissive work environment in which there is little control, a climate that is supportive to substance use may develop (Bennet, 2002; Bray, Fairbank, & Marsden, 1999; Giordano, George, & Dusck, 2001; Wayne *et al.*, 2002)

Another study found that the availability and accessibility coupled with social acceptance of substance use were major contributory factors to substance use in the workplace. Studies found that both environmental and individual factors contribute to substance use (Baird, 1999; Trinkoff, Storr, & Karren, 2000; Winwood, Winfield, & Lushington, 2003). In a study by Frone (1999, 2003), alcohol and dagga use in the workplace was not found to be common, but was mainly linked to personality characteristics. These participants used substances to regulate negative emotions and improve thinking and performance. It is argued these practices occurred in workplaces where there was a general social acceptance of substance use.

A study on substance abuse among anaesthetists found that, the majority used alcohol, with 25% abusing it. Dagga was used by 15%, and 5% used amphetamines with only 2.2% being dependent on it (Baird, 1999). In the UK a report found that 7% of doctors were abusing alcohol and drugs (Trinkoff *et a*l, 2000). It was reported that the incidence of substance use was greater in the medical profession than in the general population (Trinkoff *et al.*, 2000). Among anaesthetists the reason cited was that they were working in isolation and in an environment in which they had little control (Baird, 1999). Health professionals in general also seem reluctant to seek help readily for their own stress and personal frailties (Baird, 1999). This in turn may contribute to their work related stress and substance use (Winwood *et al.*, 2003).

It should be noted that in the light of the limited availability of literature on cemetery workers, this study could shed light on the stressors cemetery workers experience and on their coping strategies that might include substance use.

CHAPTER THREE

METHODOLOGY

In this chapter the research design and methods used in the study are presented.

3.1 RESEARCH BACKGROUND

There has been an acceleration of research, which focuses on work related stress nationally and internationally. There is a fair amount of studies that have focused on workers tasked with handling human body remains. The manual labourer category of workers in South Africa is ranked the lowest of all job categories. The cemetery workers as manual labourers, is the lowest ranking position in the Municipality. The minimum entry qualification is mainly physical fitness. The minimum age restriction is eighteen. There is no formal education that qualifies anyone to work in the cemetery. Due to high levels of unemployment, people who completed a secondary education and even higher might find themselves compelled to seek employment at the Municipality as manual labourers.

3.2 RESEARCH DESIGN

For the study, qualitative methodology was considered the most appropriate method to explore the stressors that cemetery workers experience and the coping strategies they engage in. Focus group discussions were used, as it allows for the exploration of issues and is flexible. It has been documented to be a method of choice when one seeks to get reliable information on complex topics in a relative short space of time (Breakwell, 1995).

The dynamics of group interaction within the focus group have been found to enrich the topic under discussion. This would have been less

accessible without the interaction found in a group (Breakwell, 1995). Another advantage for the use of focus groups is the synergism that is created from the group interaction and its significant role in the stimulation of new ideas and in creating high levels of energy during discussions.

Focus group discussions also reduce the pressure on individual participants to respond to every item or issue, it reduces possible anxiety and thus renders the interview enjoyable (Twinn, 1998). It also generates diversity and difference either within or between the groups, which reflect the complicated nature of everyday arguments (Breakwell, 1995). Opinions about a variety of issues are generally determined not only by individual information gathering and deliberation, but also through communication with others (Breakwell, 1995; Twinn, 1998).

3.3 PARTICIPANTS

The participants were purposively selected form six cemeteries out of the twelve major cemeteries within the Ethekwini Municipality according to the similarity in the range of duties they performed. The homogeneity of the groups in terms of work duties was viewed to be advantageous in facilitating synergism during the group interaction necessary for the stimulation of ideas and high levels of energy during discussions. The participants were on permanent contracts and were mainly adult males, with only a few female workers. They were from Indian and African ancestry.

Each focus group discussion comprised of about ten to twelve cemetery workers. Sixty-two cemetery workers participated in the study.

3.4 INTERVIEW SCHEDULE AND DATA COLLECTION

An interview schedule was used as a guide for the facilitator during the interviews to ensure that the different themes received attention (See Appendix A). The themes that were explored included perceptions around the major stressors they experience in the course of their daily duties. Attention was also paid to the different ways in which the cemetery workers managed their stressors. The themes for discussion came partly from the literature review, through informal discussions with key informants and experiences of the researcher who is an occupational nurse in the Municipality. All questions were open ended to allow respondents to talk as much as possible and to express their feelings. They were also encouraged to give solutions to the problems or to suggest possible ways in which their stressors could be managed. The focus group discussions ranged between an hour and an hour and a half.

3.5 PROCEDURE

Permission to conduct the study was obtained from the Director of Cemeteries (See Appendix C). The supervisors advised the participants about the study and informed them of the date, as agreed upon by them to ensure no interference with their work duties. The appointments were made with the cemetery workers in advance to allow employees time to think about the pending study.

On the day of the interview the researcher introduced the topic to everyone present and emphasized that participation was voluntary and confidential as no names were used in the study. The participants were informed that the obtained information was solely to be used for research purposes and that no one would be discriminated against as a result of the content of the discussions. The participants were assured that permission was sought and granted from the senior management for participation. They were also advised that they

would be allowed to leave whenever they felt the discussion was "too much" for them. It was mentioned that the results would be made available to those interested, as well as to the management. Furthermore, it was stressed that the results of the study would only provide recommendations and that it would be entirely at the management's discretion whether to adopt them or not.

The researcher requested the supervisors to leave the group to allow for a relaxed atmosphere in which the employees would be able to talk freely without fear of retribution. This was also to protect the anonymity of the participants.

One discussion per day was conducted over a period of two weeks. Each discussion was held towards the end of their shifts. This was considered the most convenient time by their supervisors. Not all the employees participated, as they had to volunteer to participate. Afterwards the participants explained their experience of the discussions as *"helping us, learning something new from others, helping us to think, we are grateful that we are recognized as important, and, we hope that things might change"*.

It is important to note that the participants knew the researcher in a professional capacity as an occupational nurse and that it might have influenced the participation and the discussions. It is possible that being acquainted with the researcher allowed for free and open discussions about issues of a sensitive nature among this group. A stranger to the participants might have had the opposite effect. Yelland and Gilford (as cited by Twinn, 1998) said that the status of the researcher plays an important role for participants from some ethnic groups. In this regard being an occupational nurse could have facilitated trust among the members of the group.

3.6 DATA ANALYSIS

The discussions were audio recorded with the permission of the participants to ensure that no information was lost. The tapes were then transcribed and the transcriptions were validated by listening to the recordings against the transcribed data. An example from a discussion is attached as an example in Appendix B.

Thematic analysis was used to analyse data. It was chosen in order to categorise the data and seek patterns in otherwise random information (Patton, 2002). The method of thematic or open coding was used to disentangle the data according to themes and sub-themes discussed in the groups as well as new themes that emerged in the process. The developing of categories and subcategories was done in accordance to the theoretical framework underpinning the analysis.

The content of each interview was analysed over and over again for substantive understanding of the stressors they experience and the coping strategies they employ. The views and expressions of the participants' were categorised according to the identified themes. This was necessary for interpretation. The resulting categories were then linked to codes which were more abstract than those used during the initial coding process. The procedure served to elaborate on the understanding of the text while inductive analysis served to deepen understandings. The similarities of themes and categories identified in the different discussions provided credibility to the data and the process that was used. Expressive quotations were noted to illustrate the views of the participants in the discussions.

In the next section the findings of the study will be presented according to the significant themes that emerged from the discussions.

CHAPTER FOUR

FINDINGS

In this section the findings of the study is presented according to the main stressors that emerged from the data. The section is concluded with the coping strategies that the cemetery workers use to manage their stressors.

4.1 WORK STRESSORS

The cemetery workers' stress revolved around the intensity of the manual labour and nature of their work on the one hand, and organisational structures and practices on the other hand.

4.1.1 Nature of the work

The intensive physical nature of the work, as well as the exposure to the natural elements were experienced as stressful. Although cemetery work was considered as *"an outside job"* an expectation existed that they should have some form of protection from the harsh weather. While some participants seemed to have adjusted well to the general physical conditions, others mentioned a previous policy that allowed them to stop work for a while and to sit in the shade when the sun was too hot. They felt the supervisors just stopped caring and were ignoring this practice.

One respondent said: *"I started here in 1997, before, when it was hot we used to be told to sit under the shade and drink water. When it rained we did not work. What happened?"*

It was also mentioned that one of them fainted from the heat. It seems that since the supervisors ignore this policy they use their own discretion by sitting down when it is too hot. They would also hide from the supervisor.

Participant: *"If the supervisor comes, one would stand up and pretend to be working, because he will ask you who told you to sit down and why are you not working?"*

Some employees however were not bothered by the heat, but working in the rain without being issued with raincoats was viewed as problematic. The employees felt that things had changed for the worse. They were comparing their department with other departments where employees did not work under the same conditions.

Participant: *"We crack stones after stones, this stresses us a lot. I have said, when we retire here, we will go straight to the grave."*

Some expressed the desire for a better education for their children as to enable them to get better jobs than being manual labourers. Digging graves during the heat of the day in particular, was considered as being inconsiderate and equal to "*slavery*". They suggested that this could be prevented if the supervisors would allocate work early in the day so that work may commence when it is still cool. However, a sense of frustration was detected due to their inability to change current practices because of their lower status in the work hierarchy.

Participant: *"...even if you try and come early, so that job allocation can be done early. The supervisors drink tea and talk their own stories; whilst the sun is getting hot instead of allocating jobs. When you talk, they ask you what are you? I'm the supervisor. You can't tell them nothing."*

Participant: *"... when I started here, I was yellow. Look at me now. I am grey from the sun"*

Participant: *"...there is nothing wrong with the job, it is the way it is allocated, when you say something you are told to shut your mouth and do the job"*

Perceptions around workload seemed to be influenced by the type of soil in which the allocated graves needed to be dug and the number of people allocated to dig a grave. In addition, the condition of the equipment also played a role in the frustrations they experienced.

The greatest dissatisfaction emerged from the soil fermentation as explained by the following participant: *"There are lots of stones. You dig out stones using a machine. Then the machine does not always fit. Blades are blunt at times. The jackhammer even fails. It looks like you don't want to do the job"*.

It was argued that the previous practice that allowed for two people to be responsible for digging a grave helped them to cope better with the physical demands of the job. They indicated that this practice was stopped without an explanation, which resulted in feelings of despair.

Participant: *"We do not think this will change"*.

There was a general feeling of being over-worked as digging is done on six out of the seven days of the week. Some felt that there was not enough time for their bodies to recover before they had to dig the next grave. Those participants who tried to study part-time to improve themselves and to possibly move to a better job, had to quit as they were falling asleep in class due to physical exhaustion. However, some participants felt that their workload *"is not bad"* after discussions with their supervisors and subsequent changes. As one participant stated: *"It is now better"*.

It was mentioned that the strenuous nature of their work impacts on their social life and their family relationships, especially their intimate relationships with their partners. It was further perceived to affect them psychologically.

Participant: *"It physically eats you up. By the time you get home you are tired you cannot do anything. Your wife will be looking at the ceiling and you look the other way".*

Participant: *"Even if you were married it was a problem. You are too tired to do anything and you can't have children."*

Due to the hard nature of a physically strenuous job of digging, their hands had formed calluses which made them very hard and deformed. A participant explained that he used to feel ashamed to shake hands with people because of his hands.

The pauper burials in some cemeteries seemed to be experienced as very frustrating as they often have to manage several burials in a limited timeframe. It was mentioned that *"sometimes there will be seventeen pauper burials, and then the undertakers come late".* This implies that they have to complete the work before they can go home. One participant said: *"the way we work here is like we are boys. I hate this job and the manager. You must come here during the pauper burials and witness for yourself".*

The increase in coffin burials is another source of frustration as cemetery workers often have to increase the size of an already dug grave to enable the coffin to fit in. The frustration seems to stem from the assumption that their job was done, and then to realize that they need to go back and increase the size of the grave.

One person tasked with cleaning the cemetery felt it was *"too much"* for her as she had to clean up everyday where homeless people and others have defecated during the night. She says that every morning there will be a pungent smell and she has to clean it up. This was not found in all the cemeteries though.

4.1.2 Contact with the public

The Cemetery was seen as a public place in which members of the public come and go as they please especially during the day. It is also the time that employees are at work. While this was not perceived as a problem in general, a few incidences with members of the public led to conflict and even newspaper reports. This led to negative publicity for the cemeteries as well as misconceptions because the public were perceived as not understanding the nature of their work.

Participant: *"There was this time when a member of the public came and saw this body on top of the grave. He asked me what I was doing to his grandmother. Then there was a fight. He said he was going to the press to expose this and then later the Isolezwe reporter came and started taking photos. ..... Then the director said the grave must not be worked on, and the body had to be put back".*

Another participant told about an incident where he was recycling a grave when he saw someone coming towards him. He apparently panicked and started running towards the bush with the bones in his hands. A newspaper report later indicated that he was throwing the bones away. They complained that sometimes they were falsely accused of stealing flowers and fruit from the graves by the families of the belated persons. It was mentioned that the public don't understand that there are *"monkeys and paupers who are naughty".* These accusations degraded them as they were made to feel that they are not regarded as proper human beings. In their defence they stated

that they *"have values and respect for the dead and their families, and would never steal from the dead"*.

4.1.3 Concerns about health, well-being and safety.

Some concerns were raised around issues of physical and mental health as well as personal safety that stems from the nature of the work and the fact that they work in a public place i.e. the cemetery. From the discussions, issues around the recycling and exhumation of graves emerged as the most stressful part of their tasks. They find it psychologically stressful and raised concerns about the impact that recycling has on their general health status. While some acceptance regarding the physical nature of the work was detected, the recycling of graves seemed to be the most difficult aspect to come to terms with and was seen as a task that should be avoided. Some participants travel greater distances from home in order to work in those cemeteries where recycling is not done. It is however not always possible to avoid this, as they were often tasked with exhumation without having a choice in the matter.

A sense of anxiety, deep remorse, shock and even fear was detected from the information that was shared. Some expressed anger with regards to the fact that they are supposedly expected to do recycling but end up doing exhumation without the necessary protective clothing or adequate compensation. The people who are responsible for exhumation however receive a higher salary. They were also confused as to the criteria that are used to distinguish between recycling and exhumation.

Their ignorance as to the cause of death of the bodies they handle, especially when they are involved in the recycling of the graves, brings anxiety and uncertainty. The wearing of gloves, and sometimes masks, did not ease their anxiety as they questioned whether protective clothing will protect them adequately.

In some instances the allocated masks were viewed as *"useless"*, as it makes them *"suffocate, and one cannot breathe easily, hence we do not wear it"*. Yet, they seemed to be concerned that they breathe in the sand of the graves and this might cause illness.

Participant: *"We are not given the masks, disinfectants and clothes that are given to the exhumers. We can't question it because if we do we will hear them say that you'll see who you will look like."*

Participant: *"Some of the sheets we see had blood stains. We don't know what this person died off, and now we have to handle the remains. I am afraid we are going to get sick .... it could be contagious ...".*

The smell of decomposing human remains in particular, made the recycling of the graves unpleasant. It seemed a problem that the new graves were on top of the older graves that had to be recycled and that the fluids would drain into the older graves.

For the participants the recycling of graves reflected a lack of respect for the dead, especially if it was a new grave that had to be recycled. An incident where a new grave was recycled led one of the participants to express a desire to be cremated as the experience left him with remorse and guilt for showing so little respect. The *"completeness of the body was too much"* and he did not want to go through the same process of being buried and then "disturbed" later to make space for someone else, The participant indicated that it took a long time for the bad memories to fade.

Participant: *"I do not have a problem with my work, but second hand graves, I don't like it when I encounter bones. One, two up to four heads in one grave - it is frightening. By the time you reach six feet you have encountered several heads. This is not easy".*

Participant: *"I think it is better to work amongst the dead than the living. The person who is dead must not be disturbed. Graves should not be interfered with."*

Recycling was seen to bring a change within them as reflected by the following:

Participant: *"... recycling makes you hard. You end having no feelings, which is not good".*

Anxiety and fear is elicited when they sometimes find razor blades and knives buried in the graves and the fact that they are unable to explain it.
Participant: *"You do not know why it is there. I drink to forget it".*
Some respondents felt very strong that the appearance of knives and blades in some graves were detrimental of their mental health.

A discussion emerged around the ethics of recycling. This was evident in view of participants. *"When there are too many bones you have to dig a hole in the passage and bury them there. The next person that will use the grave must find it clean. The council is robbing people because they take the money from people and remove the paupers. Maybe this is why we have no money, we are cursed. These ghosts take our money"*

There was also the feeling that the dead should be left alone, hence recycling was not taken kindly by the participants. The very interference with the graves where someone had been buried, brought feelings of unease to the participants who were doing this, against their will, as part of their daily routine. It was different for the people that actually applied to be *"Exhumers"*. These people deliberately chose to do this kind of job for monetary incentives. There was an incentive for being an exhumer as opposed to being a "grave digger".

There were concerns for their physical health about the findings in the bottoms of the graves. Some participants said: *"they found blue dust or dust of different colours. How safe is this dust. .... what if the thing that killed these people makes us sick as it gets into the body as we breathe in this dust".*

An opinion was stated that they should be given milk to drink for the dust they breathe in because milk could protect them from getting illnesses. Some were concerned about the graves in which people who had died in 1918 following the influenza were buried. These graves are now being recycled to make space for the new graves. There was a general feeling that the nature of work might result in them getting diseases.

One participant said when he started to work at the cemetery he did not have *"the sand rash"* but now he has and it stems from the sand he comes into contact with. When he reported it, he was apparently told that it is not a *"sand rash"*. The anxieties about getting illnesses were further exacerbated by the fact that annual medical check ups are not being done. The participants were concerned of being buried alive in a grave while digging or being bitten by snakes. These fears were exasperated by the current practice of *"one person"* per grave.

Participant: *"Graves do cave in and may bury the person. How am I supposed to get help? There are snakes... if I am bitten who will know, how will I get help?"*

The general poor state of hygiene in the ablution blocks was not acceptable to the participants. It was mentioned that the toilets were not cleaned and whenever they asked about it they were told that *"there is no cleaner"*. There was a feeling amongst the participants that they were neglected by management.

The cemetery workers mentioned that they experienced problems due to a lack of access to drinking water. It was also problematic to keep their food for the day fresh, as there was no cool place to keep their food.

Participant: *"No fridge, we eat our food when it is starting to get bad. We take the food with us to the graves. It is last night's food and when it gets hot it gets rotten, by the time we eat it. We are not allowed to come back once we are out."*

The participants reported that despite the filth they are strong, their immune systems are strong and they do not get ill – they seemed proud of their health and their good health status as labourers – the fact that they are healthy seems to improve their status.

4.2 MANAGEMENT STRUCTURES AND PRACTICES

The issues that impacted on their general job satisfaction and well-being were related to an uneven workload distribution, a non-caring attitude of the management regarding their plight, as well as insecurity. Various management structures and practices emerged as stressful in the sense that they are often helpless in affecting any change.

4.2.1 Workload distribution

An uneven distribution of grave digging resulted in some dissatisfaction as it was perceived that *"some people get graves, some don't"*. There was a perception that work allocation was used as a form of "*punishment*" to those who complain.

Participant: *"Those that don't listen were given hard jobs"*.
Feelings were expressed that they were misled by being employed as grave diggers only then to be used in the recycling of graves. This was

seen as an unfair management practice. They perceived themselves not able to challenge these practices.

Participant: "*I was conned. At the interview I was only asked if I could dig graves, and I answered yes. No one mentioned the bones and recycles. I was not ready for this but now I do it. What can I do?*"

The system of rotation seemed to create problems. They did not like to be sent to work in other cemeteries. A lot of effort was put into their work at their cemetery in order to make it look neat. They are then sent to assist in other cemeteries and when they come back their cemetery is *"overgrown"* and they have to start all over again. Helplessness was detected because they had little or no influence at all over basic decisions about work allocation and rotation.

There was also a problem with the terrain. Some sites had soft sand and some sites had stones and rocks. There was a general feeling that supervisors do not realise this when they allocate jobs. This was a contributory factor to physical exhaustion.

4.2.2 Lack of acknowledgement

Despite the effort they put into their strenuous jobs, most felt that their efforts were not acknowledged and that no appreciation is shown for any task well performed.

Participant: *"We cut grass every week but the manager will not come and say that the place is nice. When you go to other cemeteries the grass is grown over people's heads. In the African townships, they do not go there because the people there will kick their ...."*

There was also a perception that the supervisors' behaviour was not acceptable. As one participant put it: *"...the supervisors behaved like*

kings and wanted to be followed all over especially when their friends come over". There was somehow a feeling of being belittled by them. Some participants viewed their supervisors as *"unfeeling"* despite the fact that they themselves were once grave diggers and should therefore understand their situation better. The supervisors seemed to demonstrate little sympathy even when workers report that they do not feel well.

Participant: *"These people were not taken from outside, they used to complain too, but now..."*

The lack of caring was also reflected in that the management did not ensure that they had the necessary protective footwear.

Participant: *"Our feet get into the water because the boots have a hole. They don't give us. You have to fight."*

4.2.3 Bureaucracy in the organisation.

Change seems to take place at a very slow pace in the organisation. They indicated that they have outstanding complaints since 1999 and as the previous director left, they have little faith that their issues will ever be considered. However, it seems that their problems remain consistent *"it is still the same, whoever comes to this place will get distressed and he will also get dirty."*

The fact that they played no role in any decision making and are often *"only told not explained about changes and tasks...we only follow instructions"* contribute to their daily frustrations.

Taking leave emerged as another thorny issue. There was a feeling of being treated unfairly when it came to taking leave. One participant actually felt that *"the manager is not fair, we are not allowed to take leave between October and May but they can take leave as they want.*

Christmas time we are off only 25 and 26 but 27 we have to be back at work".

It was explained that when someone in their family dies that they are not able to attend the funeral because they are working on Saturdays. This was another change made to their employment agreement in which they seemed to have had no part. They were also not sure whether the Union would be able to affect some change in this regard.

Participant: *"When we were employed, we were not told this was a six day job. It had always been a 5 day week until 2001"*

Participant: *"We only have Sunday to do the washing and rest".*

Despite of all the problems mentioned, it seemed that some of the participants derived a certain amount of satisfaction from the flexibility that the work environment offered, like being allowed to go home when they have completed their work for the day.

4.2.4 Lack of promotional prospects

There was agreement from most participants that there were very few prospects of promotion, due to their low levels of education and literacy.

Participant: *"I have no future, but I'll stay".*

However, a few believed that they had other skills but that there were no opportunities to put them to use. They expressed that they had little faith in the possibility of inter-departmental transfers. They seemed to learn too late of other available positions in other departments and had no faith that their supervisor would forward their applications for transfer.

Participant: *"Because of our lack of skills, even other departments were not keen on employing us; I just know we are stuck here."*
The very hierarchical structure of the organization also contributed to limited chances of growth and inter-departmental movements.

4.3 COPING STRATEGIES

The cemetery workers engaged in some debate around being employed in a socio-economic context of unemployment and poverty. Their justification for remaining in their jobs seemed to assist them in coping with their adverse working conditions and stressors. Substance use emerged albeit reluctantly, as another coping strategy. It was however surrounded by secrecy and controversy.

4.3.1 Employment in a socio-economic context of high levels of unemployment

The physical and emotional hardships as well as unsatisfactory working conditions under which the cemetery workers have work, seemed to be outweighed by feelings of relief and gratitude of being employed in times where so many people are unemployed. Being a cemetery worker was not viewed as the ideal position or a kind of work that they would like their children to have. It was nevertheless *"a job"*. Some yearned to move to other departments, while others distanced themselves from what they are doing by describing their work as *"just a job"*. The security of *"having a job"* is not only viewed in terms of themselves, but rather for their families and children as reflected by the following participant's views: *"This is a job like any other. It helps us pay the bills. Life goes on. I can feed my family"*.

Participant: *"We can educate our children and can afford things"*.
One female respondent said that the job was very demanding but *"My children are still small and I have to send them to school so that they*

don't end up like me. I have to persevere. I need a job that pays as I am a single parent."

Their security was not only located in being employed, but also because of the continuous need for graves that imply a continuous need to employ people as cemetery workers. A participant explained as follows: *"The council is secure, one thing we know, and we can never come here and be told our jobs are finished. People will always die as they have been dying before."*

In the absence of alternative work choices, the cemetery workers explained that in order to live, they need to do things that they normally would not have liked to do, like working in the cemetery. This was a message that they would give to their children as explained by a participant: *"...Because he has to live, if there was no other job, he must take it - what can I do?"*

Another participant explained that being a cemetery worker with all the difficulties it entails, should be seen as a major sacrifice that he as a father is willing to make for the well-being of his family and thus worthy of earning respect from his children. The participants stressed the need for their children to get an education that would enable them to *"get better jobs so that they do not have to go through these difficulties".*

Some seemed to have adjusted to the physical nature of their work and accepted their situation because they could not see any alternatives.

Participant: *"We can't stop what we do in any weather condition. We have to do what the supervisor says we must do. It's been twenty years; there is nothing I can do".*

4.3.2 Substance use

When this topic was introduced there was laughter and curiosity. When asked why they thought it was funny, it was said: *"Most of us do it, but some will not come out right."* It was mentioned that some of their colleagues had been referred to outside organizations like the South African National Council for Alcoholism, to overcome their substance use problems. The need for substance use was viewed as a natural consequence of being a cemetery worker.

Participant: *"If you would do this job, you would also end up doing it".* Some participants explained that *"when we first came here, we did not use it, but started using it to help us forget the difficulties of the job".* Two to three beers were drunk in the evening at home *"just to relax".* The use of "dagga" (marijuana) was believed to help them cope better with anger towards each other.

Participant: *"The next day it would all be forgotten. This helps to prevent grudges against each other".*

When probed about the dagga sources, it emerged that they obtained it at work. Some participants claimed that *"the dagga just grows in certain parts of the cemetery and because it does not belong to anyone, we help ourselves to it".* When asked why they did not uproot it, there was laughter. While smoking dagga was seen to decrease stress levels, it was also taken to give *"more strength to perform the job. When I do not smoke, I get tired very easily".* The same participant however warned that it should be used with caution, as it can lead to trouble. Another view was that it posed no problem: *"As long as you were not caught".* Some discussion emerged around the fact that it was against the law to be in possession of dagga and also against the organisation's policy. Some were of the opinion that *"we do not break the law at work and smoke dagga as it makes us finish the graves quicker. You can't drink and smoke at home on Sundays*

as you need to be fresh for work on Monday, hence we smoke at work".
Participant: *"I prefer to smoke dagga and finish the work quickly. Also they cannot test me if I have smoked dagga, but alcohol they can. And I can get into trouble".*

One participant said: *"I can run from here to town. That is if I had a drink and a smoke".*

Drinking was seen as a way to escape from the realities of the work environment.
Participant: "*I leave here I am going there.* (Referring to a place where one can obtain alcohol). *I have to drink to forget about what happened during the day. It is also not easy to drink at work because the supervisor is sharp*".

The role of the supervisor in the use of substances during working hours seemed to be inconsistent. In situations where supervision was minimal both in terms of time and interest, substance use during working hours seemed to have been easier. However, in some instances adequate supervision did not deter the employees from using substances. It was said that substance use is common among the male cemetery workers: *"most of us do it. Some people will not admit it. However there are those who go to church and do not do it."*

On the other hand the female employees claimed not to use substances to cope with the stressors and neither did their male counterparts disagree with them.

4.3.3 Spiritual coping

Only a few participants reported spiritual coping strategies. The participants felt that the spiritual way of managing stress kept them out of trouble. All problems were attributed to God's will. One participant

said that he used to drink and got into trouble but since he was rehabilitated and decided to use his spirituality, he felt that he was able to forgive others easily. It was believed that this strategy made life easier.

CHAPTER FIVE

DISCUSSION OF RESULTS

It was learned from the data that the cemetery workers' subjective experiences of their work environment have been interpreted as stressful and are reflected by some negative feelings and a lack of control to effect change. These findings about the cemetery workers' stress correspond to the pioneer work of Lazarus and Folkman (1984) and Lazarus (1986), in which the subjective and not the objective stress, caused problems. During the primary appraisal phase there was a continuous monitoring of a person's interaction with the environment in terms of demands, abilities, competencies, constraints and available support.

It is during this phase that an event is appraised and a person recognises that there is a problem. This is usually followed by unpleasant emotions or general discomfort. This is not viewed as a conscious process, as stress is a psychological state which arises from the imbalance between a person's perception of the demands of the situation and the perceived ability to cope with the demands (Cox *et al.*, 2000; Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002). During the secondary appraisal phase, decisions need to be taken about how a person will cope with the problem. Stress increases when people realise that they cannot adequately deal with problems or demands placed on them, due to inefficient coping abilities or resources available to overcome the harm, threat or challenge (Lazarus, 1986). For the cemetery workers this was particularly frustrating. While it seemed that they might have the ability to overcome some stressors because of their ideas on how to manage them, they seemed not to be in a position to effect any change.

5.1 STRESSORS EXPERIENCED

For the cemetery workers the stressors that emerged ranged from the physical nature of the work, their inefficient relationships with the managerial staff of the organisation and the handling of human remains. Various studies supported the high levels of stress experienced by manual labourers (George 2002; Wayne 2003). In this study, the stress that emerged from being a manual labourer is linked to the strenuous physical labour that is required to dig graves. Work overload, job ambiguity and conflicting performance expectations were found to be a cause of stress among workers (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Deacon, 2003; Giordano *et al.*, 2001; Ross, 2004; Sparrius, 1992).

Furthermore, the participants' low status within the organisational hierarchy left them with little or no power to negotiate better working conditions, i.e. perceived work overload and a six day week. They were also unable to communicate their grievances. Various studies have found that the less control workers have over their jobs, the more stress they will experience (Cox *et al.*, 2000; Cullen, 2003; Deacon, 2003; Ross, 2004; Taylor, 1999; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). In a survey conducted by the National Institute for Occupational Safety and Health in America (as cited by Giordano *et al.*, 2001), on the most stressful jobs, a lack of control was found to be the most significant factor contributing to stress. In this survey, being a manual labourer was considered as the most stressful out of twelve occupations.

While the role of the unions were mentioned as a possible course of action, the fact that different issues have remained unresolved for months, have left them sceptical and with very little hope that any grievance would be solved through this process. Feelings of helplessness in affecting any change seemed widespread.

The workload allocation process was perceived to be used by the supervisors to manage the level of complaints. Those who complained *"too much"* were being *"punished"* through the allocation of a higher workload. Through this process, job dissatisfaction was not discussed and contributed to the build-up of anger and stress. This illustrated the vulnerability and the lack of power experienced by the participants as manual labourers. They felt that they lacked specialised skills. There was a perception that if they did possess specialised skills, it would be more difficult to replace them and that they were seen and treated as *"disposable"* labour. This is also reflected in the general disregard for their most basic needs such as adequate rest, physical safety and fresh food.

In the study the cemetery workers complained about their working relationship, especially with their supervisors and management. Foot and Hook (1999) found that where negative relations between management and subordinates existed, stress levels were high. It was also found that the employees had a great need for good working relationships. Even according to Maslow's hierarchy of needs (as cited by Weiten, 2001), supportive social relationships are considered a basic human need. Studies have found that subordinates value their working relationship with their supervisors (Cook, 1997; Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002). The need to maintain a working relationship with their supervisors seemed to have contributed to an unwillingness by the cemetery workers to voice their dissatisfaction. Ettner & Gryzwacz (2001) found that black people and individuals with low levels of education, had difficulty in finding and keeping jobs in the United States. Thus once employed, they tended to avoid confrontations that would lead to job loss.

The continuous intensive physical nature of the participants' work was reported to negatively influence their relationships with their sex partners and impact adversely on their general family life. Physical exhaustion and little time off from work to recuperate seemed to

impact negatively on their sex drive. Wayne (2000) reported that stress increases when less time is spent with one's partner, and that stress may result in a loss of libido. While stress experienced at work often strained relationships at home, a healthy home life can provide a buffer against work related stress. Family responsibility and home life on the other hand was found to have impacted on workers' psychological well-being and work performance (Cook, 1997; George & Jones, 2002; Hall, 2004; Sparrius, 1992).

It was interesting to note that while they complained about the physical nature of their work on the one hand, they also felt pride in the fact that their bodies were strong and that they did not get ill. It was mentioned in particular, that they had strong immune systems. This has particular significance against the background of a high prevalence of HIV/AIDS in the country. A clear message was given that their strong bodies and immune systems were evidence that they did not have AIDS.

Participants expressed fear that they might be buried alive in a grave while digging alone. This is supportive of findings in other studies where high levels of stress were experienced by people concerned about their physical safety (Bray *et al.*, 2001; Green, 2001; Sparrius, 1992; Wayne *et al.,* 2002; Weaver, 1999). A previous practice no longer followed where two people were allocated to dig a grave, was viewed by the participants as a feasible solution to their concerns.

General job satisfaction is adversely affected when workers are exposed to severe elements of nature e.g. extreme heat and humidity. Uncomfortable weather is viewed as a stressor (Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Deacon, 2003; Ross, 2004). For the participants this seemed to be exacerbated by hunger and the accompanying low blood sugar levels due to the fact that they often had to skip lunch because their food was not edible. This was due to the lack of proper food storage facilities in high outdoor temperatures. Job dissatisfaction had been

linked to improper eating practices, and in particular when people are doing strenuous manual labour (Cook, 1997; Giordano *et al.*, 2001; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). This also occurred amongst the emergency and rescue workers (Sparrius, 1996). The allocation of small cooler boxes as well as health education around the preparation and packing of food lunches might be a solution to the problem.

The most stressful aspect of the participants' work was clearly the recycling of graves and the exhumation of bodies. Various studies reported on the high stress levels experienced by people who handle human remains (Cullen, 2003; Green, 2001; Hall, 2004; Hammond & Brooks, 2001; Lee, 2002; Peterson *et al.*, 2002; Sparrius, 1996). These studies investigated the experiences of people who were tasked with handling bodies in the mortuaries following the *"September Eleven"* attacks in the USA, and among rescue workers at accident scenes where people had to be rescued or where they were tasked with laying people to rest. In these studies the participants found it very stressful to deal with the emerging emotions during these situations. In addition, the sights, sounds and smells as well as touch sensations were considered as most unpleasant. In this study these experiences were intensified as the participants feared that they might contract diseases during the recycling and exhumation process.

The cemetery workers also believed that they might be exposed to health risks when breathing grave dust from the decomposed bodies, especially form those that died during the influenza epidemic of 1918.

Findings of blades and knives in some graves seemed to impact on the participants' mental health. There is a general belief that these instruments might take away the evil spirits that might come after the person has died and that those evil spirits may in return to harm the people who touch the grave. The fact that the cemetery workers have no option but to recycle the graves, brings turmoil for those who have strong cultural beliefs in this regard. All this seemed to affect the

participants psychologically, as they believe that all the "bad things that happened" to them are possibly related to these finds.

The participants were concerned that they were not always equipped with the appropriate protective clothing. Despite the fact that they were not *"exhumers"* they were often called to assist in this task. While masks were allocated, some reported the disregard of the use of masks as they seemed to inhibit proper breathing. It is not clear whether the masks were designed for people doing strenuous manual labour that required a higher than normal intake of oxygen, or for people performing more sedentary tasks. The lack of protection in general, made them feel vulnerable as they seemed to have little control over their work environment and this contributed to the levels of stress they experienced. Efforts to engage management in their concerns seemed not to have had any success as those who were able to speak up, ran the danger of being issued with more work.

The issue of extra payment for exhumation also emerged as another concern for the study participants. *"Exhumers"* seemed to receive extra payment whilst the grave diggers did not receive extra payment even though they performed exhumations. This was another example of their vulnerability for being exploited without being in a position to report unfair practices. Low social status within the organizational hierarchy is a often a concern for labourers (Cox *et al.*, 2000), while status incongruity was found to be a source of stress.

The participants in general experienced feelings of disappointment when it came to communication with their supervisors and management. Even though they had a low social status within the organisation hierarchy, there was a yearning to be heard. They felt this was not allowed to happen due to the bureaucratic structure of the organisation. Specific individuals were also blamed for the lack of communication. Studies reported that a lack of communication

especially concerning the job itself, could contribute to high levels of stress in the working environment (Baird, 1999; Cartwright & Cooper, 1997; Cox *et al.*, 2000; Hall, 2004; Sparrius, 1996; Weaver, 1999). Some of the stress among cemetery workers could be alleviated if they were allowed to make recommendations regarding their work. However, they could not provide solutions to some of the problems they experienced, nor able to discuss them or able to implement these solutions. In accordance with Lazarus's theory (1984), the secondary appraisal phase where people assess strategies for action might bring stress forth when they are unable to cope with the situation. Das Gupta (1992) indicated that a perceived lack of control is just as threatening as an actual lack of control. Greater participation in decision making about daily tasks has been associated with greater job satisfaction (Wayne, 1999).

The fact that the cemetery is a public place where any person may enter at anytime, contributed to feelings of vulnerability regarding personal safety and security. This seemed to have been compounded by personal experiences of muggings while being on duty. The fact that they were often alone increased their perceived vulnerability to criminals. Studies among uniformed staff and those working in public places reported similar concerns for personal safety and security (Bray *et al.*, 1999; Ettner & Gryzwacz, 2001, Hall, 2004; Weaver, 1999).

5.2 COPING STRATEGIES

Coping is viewed as an integral part of the stress process (Cox *et al.*, 2000; Gonzales-Morales, 2003; Taylor, 1999). As mentioned earlier, the transactional model of stress (Lazarus & Folkman, 1984) explains that the way in which individuals respond to stressors depend on their ability to cope with the demands placed on them by their work or the environment. Coping is thus a way or an attempt to deal with the problem. Coping is generally viewed as process and is context

dependent (Cox *et al.*, 2000). One coping strategy is not necessarily better than the other (Taylor, 1999), and people tend to use a mixture of strategies available to them (Rodriguez & Garcelan, 2002). Attempts at coping are made to manage the demands by changing, redefining or reappraising, or adapting to these demands (Cook, 1997; Cox *et al.*, 2000; Lazarus & Folkman, 1984).

From the data we learned that the cemetery workers used different coping strategies. The major coping strategy the participants engaged in was the general acceptance of their work environment. This reflects a more problem-focused coping strategy or an active coping strategy (Lazarus 1986; Marsella, 2003; Taylor, 1999). The cemetery workers engaged in a cognitive appraisal of their context and then made a positive reinterpretation of the situation. This appraisal was influenced by their awareness of high levels of unemployment in their communities and the difficulty that existed in obtaining work. Within this context they seemed grateful that they had a relatively secure and well paying job. According to this view, the cemetery workers accepted that the stressors were there to stay and that they were real, that they were employed and that the job had to be done. When this was the case, the participants continued as if nothing has happened and they seemed to have adapted positively to the situation. Green (2001) claimed that a non-response in taxing circumstances implies a response, as it is a way that people defend themselves against psycho-sensory and physical overload, especially when dealing with psychologically taxing scenes that includes human remains.

However, some cemetery workers seemed to engage actively in seeking transfers to other positions in departments where they think the work will be less stressful. This is done despite a lack of specific experience that is required by those jobs. Some kept on requesting for transfers to other cemeteries which are thought to have less stressful conditions like those cemeteries in which the recycling of graves do not take place.

The cemetery workers' awareness of job security also assisted them in the process to appraise their position as acceptable. This security stems from the fact that people will continue to die and that graves will need to be dug as the majority of people is unlikely to opt for cremation as the way of laying their beloved ones to rest. This is partly due to the African cultural and spiritual beliefs (Grootboom, 2005; Mlaba, 2004). A small minority mentioned religious practices such as prayer or other religious activities as a coping strategy. The engagement in religious practices as a way to cope with work stressors has been supported by other studies (Haag, 2000; Green, 2001; Ross, 2004). It has been reported that people who engage in spiritual contemplation in seeking guidance from higher powers have found it beneficial (Green, 2001).

Substance use among the cemetery workers was another coping strategy they engaged in to manage the stressors they experienced. The cemetery workers mentioned the use of tobacco, alcohol and even dagga. Substance use and in particular the use of alcohol or drugs such as dagga as a way to cope with stressors are supported by various studies (Cook, 1997; Frone, 1999, 2003; Ross, 2004). Substance use within the workplace has been found to be facilitated by various factors.

The cemetery workers mentioned that alcohol could be obtained during working hours and that dagga was available in the cemeteries. The availability of substance in the workplace was reported to be a major contributing factor to its use (Baird, 1999; Frone, 1999, 2003; Trinkoff *et al.*, 2000; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). Strong arguments were made by the cemetery workers for the therapeutic or calming effects of dagga and how its use assisted them in managing interpersonal conflicts. It was found in other studies that participants tended to increase the use of tobacco, coffee and alcohol when they were angry or upset (Ross, 2004). The lack of supervision had been cited in other

studies as a contributing factor in substance use in the workplace as a way to alleviate stress (Frone, 1999, 2003; George & Jones, 2002). It seemed that the likelihood of substance use among cemetery workers could be attributed to their often unsupervised and solitary work situations.

Another contributing factor to substance abuse in the workplace was social norms tolerant to the use of alcohol. Bray *et al.* (1999) reported on substance use among armed forces where alcohol use was generally accepted. Other studies reported that drinking at work was caused by external factors and were independent of the workplace e.g. the person with a family background of drinking was more likely to drink at work when faced with problems than others (Frone, 1999, 2003; Wayne *et al.*, 2002). Another study suggested that individuals with dysfunctional backgrounds and certain personal characteristics such as low self esteem were more at risk to use substance than others (Bernadine, 2003). In the study among Australian dentists it was argued that work related stress on its own did not cause substance use in the workplace (Winwood *et al.*, 2003).

Role ambiguity was found to be a contributing factor to employee substance use. Weaver (1999), found substance use among nurses who experienced role ambiguity. From the data it was clear that the cemetery workers found themselves in different roles for which they were not always well prepared for. They had to dig and recycle graves and exhume bodies when necessary, obey the instructions of the supervisors and were even confronted by the public in executing their duties in this regard.

The low occupational status of cemetery workers could also play a role in their substance use. In a study among miners, alcohol use was found to be high and linked to their low occupational status (Deacon, 2003). It should be noted that the cemetery workers viewed themselves as having the lowest status in the whole of the Ethekwini

Municipality's organisational structures. This view could stem from their inability to effect change.

The data clearly illustrates that the cemetery workers experienced various stressors related to their specific work and the organisational climate. While some have adopted functional coping strategies, it is clear that others used ineffective and health impeding coping strategies such as substance use. It was mentioned earlier that various strategies were put in place to deal with substance use in the workplace, but it seemed not have had the desired effect. Furthermore, the cemetery workers were ignorant of the physiological and emotional consequences of substance abuse. Their substance use in the workplace called for urgent and continued, appropriate prevention strategies. A friendlier work environment, where more attention is paid to participatory and empowerment processes might auger well for higher job satisfaction among cemetery workers.

In the next section attention is paid to specific recommendations to the Ethekwini Municipality for the implementation of practices to improve job satisfaction among the cemetery workers which are likely to have a positive impact on their work performance.

CHAPTER SIX

CONCLUSION AND RECOMMENDATIONS

In this last section the conclusions and recommendations which emerged from the data, are presented.

6.1 CONCLUSIONS

The results of this study indicated that cemetery workers not only experienced stress as a direct consequence of the type of work they did, but also because of their general work environment. Some cemetery workers seemed to accept that the work is of a physical nature and that they had to recycle graves, while others found the handling of human remains extremely stressful. In addition, the organisational climate contributed to unsatisfactory working conditions.

Different coping strategies were used, such as a general acceptance of the type of work they did within a context of unemployment and poverty. No one wanted to stop working as employment per se had positive effects on both individual and family levels. This was often stated as a reason as to why people continue to work, despite stressful situations. Some of the cemetery workers seemed to alleviate their anger and stress in subtle ways. The participants would not perform optimally in order to avoid repercussions for themselves but with a loss of productivity to the organization.

Substance use had been reported to be used as a way of coping with both physical and psychological stressors as experienced by the cemetery workers. The use of substances possibly stemmed from a desire to self-regulate, or reduce the negative emotions that were experienced, but also from the desire to improve their work output and performance.

The use of substances in the workplace was made possible because it was easily accessible and because of supportive social norms in this regard. The fact that the usage of illegal substances like dagga was not reported, supports this argument and alcohol use seemed to be generally tolerated.

The study revealed opportunities for interventions by the Municipal management in order to reduce some of the stressors and thereby preventing long term negative effects of substance abuse.

6.2 GENERAL RECOMMENDATIONS

The Municipality should be concerned with substance use by the employees, especially during working hours. Although some alcohol use had been noted, the extent of illegal substance use might not be known. This study has pointed to the need for remedial action without singling out certain employees. The issue of substance use is not unique to the cemetery worker but rather a general problem in various work settings (Frone 1999; Ross, 2004). It must also be remembered that contributory factors may not only stem from organisational aspects, but that factors such as socio-economic conditions, physiological predispositions and others may influence substance abuse.

The use of substances by employees may be partially reduced by changing the misconceptions that exists around the role that substance use plays in the managing of stress, emotions and in improving endurance. In addition, the social climate at work seemed to facilitate substance use. This could be partly addressed by improved supervision and monitoring. Increased access to counselling and professional services in order to aid workers in managing their stress and emotional problems might also prevent the use of

substances and possibly prevent later negative health effects of substance use.

The early recognition of stress symptoms such as hostility and frequent absenteeism would assist management in realising that they have to refer the workers to the appropriate services for counselling and that in doing so they can prevent the escalation of problems that might otherwise prove to be costly to the organisation. General information about stress management might also be useful to the cemetery workers. The *"Wellness Programme"* of the Municipality should be extended to include the cemetery workers as this programme focuses on both the physical and the mental conditions of employees.

Other departments like the emergency services within the Municipality have already embarked on this approach and anecdotal evidence suggests a decrease in premature termination of services has been noted. Recreation as an integral part of working conditions could improve general job satisfaction and play a positive role in stress relief.

The guidelines provided by the Occupational Health and Safety Act 85 of 1993, about facilities and working conditions, should be brought to the attention of management. Working in extreme weather conditions can be managed by improved heat stress policies. These policies should be made known to the employees and attention should be paid to strategies to aid the implementation thereof. A careful balance should be sought to minimize work overload as well as work underload, as both have negative effects on workers. The terrain in which the cemetery workers have to work and the equipment they require for the task at hand needs to be taken into account when job allocations are done in order to manage the levels of physical exhaustion. Personal safety and security, as well as regular and healthy meals and access to water, need attention. A possibility could

be to have manned entrances into the cemeteries in order to control public entry and exit. Continuous supervision and the use of two way radios or pool cell phones could improve communication in instances where assistance is needed.

Greater participation of cemetery workers in decisions that pertain directly to their working circumstances should be sought. This should result in greater control over the execution of their work and could also increase the accountability of the workers. Improved communication between management and the workers. Supervisors might benefit from specific training initiatives to improve their communication and leadership skills.

Meetings should be held at regular scheduled intervals. Written minutes must be recorded and employees must be allowed to air their views in a controlled forum where constructive suggestions could be adopted for practice. It would be important to ensure that any changes to the hours and conditions of working be communicated to the cemetery workers in an appropriate and timeous way.

The employees must be informed of the content of the Basic Conditions of Employment Act. Attempts should be made to minimize unpredictability and ambiguity with regards to their job descriptions and working conditions. Applicants should be told exactly what is expected of them during the interviewing process and new employees must undergo an induction phase.

The fact that graves are recycled and that bodies are exhumed must be communicated to all applicants. Cemetery workers were particularly upset by the fact that they were not advised of the fact that they would be recycling graves. Careful selection and placement is important. Ensuring that the employees' ability, education level and experience, match the job requirements, an even spread of the workload could be achieved. A mismatch may cause frustration,

especially in the situation where promotional possibilities are limited. The Occupational Health and Safety department needs to revise the pre-placement medical screening process. Specific attention must be paid to the immunisation of employees and they must be issued with protective clothing. The constant exposure to dust must be investigated as well as the suitability of the existing masks that cemetery workers are issued with.

Although the cemetery workers seemed to be at the lower end of the organisational hierarchy, attention should be paid to their development within the organisation. In-service training could enhance internal and stable attributions that are necessary for success. This study highlighted the need for acquiring improved skills and motivation in order to decrease the feeling of helplessness in affecting change at work. The various training opportunities which are available within the organisation like the *Education scheme* and the *Adult Basic Education Training Initiative* should be accessible to the workers and they need to be encouraged to participate in these opportunities. This could increase possibilities for change, progress and promotion.

Specific efforts to foster greater awareness and mutual respect for cultural diversity within the organisation would improve working conditions significantly as well as interpersonal relationships between the cemetery workers and the different levels of management. It should be noted that increased flexibility and sensitivity to diversity within the workplace do not necessarily imply a lowering of working standards. A culture of punishment should be replaced with a culture of acknowledgement of a job well done, to promote general well-being and self-esteem among the cemetery workers.

6.3 SUGGESTIONS FOR FUTURE RESEARCH

This qualitative study aimed to study the particular work related stressors of the cemetery worker and their coping strategies with specific reference to substance use in a qualitative way. It might be valuable to explore the issues found in this study in a representative quantitative study among cemetery workers or even among other manual labourers within the Ethekwini Municipality.

6.4 LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY

The qualitative study was confined to some of the Ethekwini Municipality workers and therefore the findings can not be generalised to other cemetery workers or other manual labourers. Stress related psychological disorders were not sufficiently investigated and a further study in this regard could explore this issue in more depth.

While the researcher is of the view that her acquaintance with the participants had a positive influence on the quality of the data, it is possible that this influenced the participants to respond in a particular way.

6.5 SUMMARY

The study aimed to understand work related stress and substance use among the cemetery workers within the Ethekwini Municipality. The processes by which recycling and exhumation took place, were perceived as major stressors among the cemetery workers, while the inadequate work relationships with management decreased their general job satisfaction. Work and health are intimately connected, yet complex, therefore a healthy inter-relationship between the cemetery workers and their employer is likely to have a positive influence on the well-being of the employees. The use of alcohol and dagga within the workplace seemed to used as a coping strategy to manage stress.

The use of dagga in the workplace is problematic as it seems that there are not policies or procedures in place to manage and enforce regulations against its use.

The discussions with the cemetery workers opened a platform for the study participants to air their views which they reported not to have under normal circumstances. It can be concluded that the information gained from this study is truly valuable, and it is hoped that it will provide an impetus for the necessary interventions to facilitate positive change for cemetery workers of the Municipality.

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APPENDIX A

INTERVIEW SCHEDULE FOR FOCUS GROUPS

Understanding work related stress and substance use among Cemetery Workers of the Ethekwini Municipality, Durban, South Africa.

Personal Details of the group:

Age

How long in service

Educational background

1. I would like to understand the type of work you do in more details as well as your experiences during your work.

2. Tell me about the things that you like most about your job.

3. Tell me about the things that you don't like about your job.
   Probe:
   - Working Hours
   - Supervision
   - Deadlines
   - Conflict with Peers/colleagues/family
   - Grave digging /exhumation/recycling
   - Physical conditions, temperatures
   - Leave /Time off

4. Describe a time where you really felt stressed out.

5. How did you cope with the situation?

   Probe:

   - Substance use, alcohol, tobacco,

6. If you were given a chance, what would you change about your job and why?

7. Describe a normal work day for me.

   Probe:

   - Use of substances: tobacco, alcohol, dagga.

8. Describe how you relax at the end of the day?

APPENDIX B

EXAMPLE OF A FOCUS GROUP DISCUSSION

1. *I would like to understand the type of work you do in more details as well as your experience during work.*

2. *Tell me about the things you like most about your job?*

I like the fact that I do have a job. That's important, some people do not have job.

We can educate our children, pay for things, house and clothes.

I like my job because sometimes when I have finished before time my supervisor let's me off early.

The supervisor is not very strict; sometimes he does not come around the whole day when they have meetings in town.

I like my job except for the dust.

It's a job. I get paid, life goes on, and I can feed my family

The municipality is a good place to work.

There is job security

Sometimes when you finished your job you can go home.

3. *Tell me about the things you do not like about you job?*

I do not like the sun when it is too hot we can't sit in the shade.

The supervisor comes and ask you why you not working. They think you do not want to work. Before we use to be given water to drink and could sit down, it all stopped and we do not know why.

At the end of the day you are tired like a dog. You can't help it.

You get home and you fall off to sleep and the next thing is morning.

Sometimes you look at the ceiling your wife is looking at the ceiling, you cannot do anything.

I get home and I am tired I think about work, I have my beers and relax. I cannot talk about my work to anyone because they will not understand. Probe- I do not want them to know what I go through during the day.

All weather conditions, we have to work. We can't stop unless the supervisor says so. It's been twenty years there is nothing I can do. If you complain you are told, if you don't like it here you can quit.

Can we get help? Probe- Is there no way you can help us health wise. We do not know how these people died. We wear gloves but no masks. Feet get into the water sometimes the boots have holes. Probe- Sometimes, they don't give us new ones, you have to fight.

Supervision:
The supervisors are not the same. Some are too strict some are okay. They do not follow you all the time. Sometimes we are left alone for too long. They leave you in the morning and will only see you in the afternoon. Probe- It would be better if they stay and see how you work. In this way they will see how hard we work especially where there are stones.

Deadlines:
Sometimes you are given too much work. It depends on the burials. If there are too many people who will be buried then you need to dig more graves. The supervisors rush you. I don't blame them. There are times where we have far too many graves to dig. Most people bury on a Saturday. This makes more work for us. Beginning of the week it will be slow. Come Thursday and Friday more graves are allocated. This causes a lot of stress as the supervisor rushes you to finish so that you can go and dig the next grave and on and on. By the afternoon you are finished.

Working Hours
Working hours are okay. It's the weekend work. Saturdays, we are not supposed to work, if we do it must be paid overtime. It would also provide some form of security to have someone nearby.

Conflict with peers/colleagues/family:
We do have our fights sometimes with fellow employees. These are minor. We don't hold grudges .We are like brothers. There are people you do not want to work with. Probe-You just avoid them. We help each other most of the time. There are those who will not help.
At home sometimes we fight. They don't understand what one goes through during the day. You get home you don't want to talk. The children want to play with you. You can't. All you want is to be let

alone. Sometimes this poses problems with your spouse. They think you are angry with them. You can't explain these things. You take the strains home with you yet you do not want to talk about it. It poses problems. You sleep and your spouse asks you why you were turning do much .You can't explain.

Working with the dead/ amongst the dead. Exhumation/recycling
This is the worst part if working here. There is no difference in recycling and exhumation. Only the money is different. Exhumers get paid more. The job is the same. We are also asked to assist with exhumation when someone form that gang is off.
I believe the dead must be respected. They must be left alone.
Sometimes you find more than one skull in one grave sometimes four. The deeper you dig there appears another skull. It becomes scary.
The things you find inside the grave. Knives and blades. Sometimes cloths with blood. You do not know how the person died and it is not nice. You don't know if you can catch the disease.
One time we found this sheet with blood and we had to take it out. It was scarry. We don't know what killed the person or how the person died
Sometimes you are asked to assist in the graves, the smells but you can't refuse because it's a job. You have to preserve.

Physical conditions
The land is not the same. Some times you dig a stone after stone. The machines sometimes do not fit or the blade is blunt. It looks like you do not want to work. It takes two to three days to dig one grave. There is no blanket rule. Some people get better graves some don't One day I felt so bad that I thought twice about leaving the job

At the end of the day I am tired .You can't help it
Physical demands, the job kills you. When we retire here we will just die.

Weather conditions
We can't stop. We have to do what the supervisor tells you. Twenty years I have been here. There is nothing I can do.

Sometimes the sun is too hot. We can't sit down. Before they use to give us water and tell us to sit down in the shade. It has all changed. If the supervisor finds you sitting he will ask you who told you to sit down. You have to hide to sit if he comes you stand up quickly.
Look at me when I started here, I was yellow. Look at me now. I am grey from the sun.

When it rains sometimes we were rain coats and go and dig. It is difficult because as you dig the grave is filling with water.
When it rains some people do not work. We get raincoats and we are sent to work. Machine operators, they don't cut when it rains.

Feet get into water sometimes boots have holes and they don't give us. You have to fight.
Some times the grass cutters do not go out in the rain.

Is there no better way to help us health wise? We don't know how these people died. I wear gloves but no masks General worker maintains grass cutting

Working conditions
Working conditions have changed since we came over to the Ethekwini Municipality.
No one explained the changes .We use to be a five day shift all of a sudden we were told we had to work Saturday as well no overtime pay. Other departments when they work Saturdays they are paid overtime. In other departments they work because they want to work for extra money. Why is it different with us?

4. Describe the time when you felt really stressed.

One day I felt so bad I wanted to quit my job. I thought twice about leaving. Probe-
The coffin was new. I was told to take it out. Probe- The grave was to be recycled. Probe-I do not know how old the grave was. This made me to decide that I will never be buried.
The coffin was heavy. This was the time a person came and saw the body on top of the grave. He asked what we were doing. He left and came back with reporters and the director. I took the director to the grave and he said we must leave it. We had to put the person back. Two to three months later we were told to recycle the grave again. It was not explained why and why we had to stop then.
The director did not come back to tell us why we had to stop recycling or we had to start again.
To work well is to be free. We live in a democratic country. I feel like there is no change with the new government. I live locally and get confronted by the public. They ask me about these things. I just tell them I follow instructions.
I do not like the smells. You will be digging the grave below the one which was use on the weekend. The juices sip through and they smell. Sometimes the boots are torn .We do not get masks.

5. How did you cope with the situation?

It took me time to forget. Actually as I said I will never forget, but I guess with time and doing it over and over again. I do not feel as bad. Smoking dagga helps. Probe- You find strength and courage which you never knew you had. Probe- Smoking dagga does not get me into trouble as alcohol.
After work I try and keep to myself and at home to avoid the inquisitive neighbors.

I am still angry at management for not explaining these things to us. I keep quiet because when you talk or complain too much. They don't like you.

6. *If you were given a chance what would you change about your job?*

There would be no recycling of graves. Probe- I would make sure I get more land to burry the people. The municipality has a lot of land but does not want to use.
I would allocate to people to a grave especially where there are stones.
Overtime would be paid. All Saturdays and public holidays need to be paid.

7. Describe a normal day for you in terms of working hours.

When we come in the morning the supervisors ignore us. They stand around and drink tea and chat instead of allocating us work before it is too hot. We get allocated work and go to different places some alone. This is where we can smoke and drink because no supervisor is nearby. The job gets lonely and it is hard
Use of substance: tobacco, alcohol, dagga

Most of us use it. Only a few do not. Most of us smoke tobacco. It is normal .Even the supervisors they smoke tobacco. There is nothing wrong. It is only the price. It has gone up. Sometimes we buy loose to save money. We cannot afford the packet sometimes, it is too costly. It is better to smoke the weed (dagga). It come free and is more effective

Dagga, we all smoke. It helps us to cope with the job. It helps us to forget the difficulties of the job.
Not everyone smokes. Those that like they do. No one says anything.

Probe: Legal implications
We know it is illegal but no one has ever been caught or got into trouble. So we smoke.

Probe: Availability

We sometimes buy it. Sometimes it just grows here. Then we help ourselves because it belongs to nobody.
The Cemetery is a public place anyone walks in and out. It must have fallen form the public and it grew. It is weed you know.

When I smoke dagga it makes me forget about a lot things. I sometimes get angry with certain people but when I smoke dagga the next day I have forgotten everything.

When I smoke dagga I can finish digging the grave (sharp, sharp) quickly. I can actually run from here to town and back and not feel tired.
Dagga helps me to sleep like a baby. I do not have bad dreams about the job.
When I am very angry I smoke dagga.It helps to be brave and say what I want to say.

Alcohol:
Most of us drink. I like "Juba" (commercialized Zulu beer).It is cheap and when cold it takes away the heat.
I drink anything. At work I drink only beers because if I drink hot stuff I will fall asleep and can get into trouble.
Alcohol is better at home cannot get into trouble .The supervisors can smell alcohol and can send you for testing. That can get you into trouble.Dagga they cannot test you. It does not get you into trouble.
Alcohol is not easily available. You have to go out to get it. This can get you into trouble if the supervisor does not find you, as opposed to dagga.
If you can work here too you can start smoking. When I came here I never smoked, but now I can't help it.
It is the job that pushes you to it. You can manage hard work and not feel it. You cannot smell bad odours. Even if you do you do not care.

8. *Describe how you relax at the end of the day.*

I get home I am too tired and just fall asleep.
I do smoke so that I don't have to think about the bad things that happen at work.
I have one or two beers and go to sleep. You can't have too much because you need to be fresh for the next day. Weekends I have beers with my friends; we watch sport or go to "sheebens" and dance.
Sundays you need to relax and prepare for the Monday. If you are too tired you can't make it here. The job can kill you.
When I had too much I just do not come to work I tell them I was sick. They can't prove anything. You sometimes get into trouble when you take too much sick leave.
I get home sit with my kids' watch a bit of television. I fall off to sleep.
Weekdays and Saturdays, there is very little times to do anything

APPENDIX C

INFORMED CONSENT

My name is Sibusisiwe Cordelia Mzamo. I am doing a research project entitled "Understanding the relationship between work related stressors and substance use among the cemetery workers in the Ethekwini Municipality". This is for the partial fulfillment of the Masters in Health Promotion degree, School of Psychology, University of KwaZulu –Natal. My supervisor is Professor Anna Meyer-Weitz. She can be contacted at 031-2607618
I am directing the project and can be contacted at 166 Old Fort Place, Durban. My telephone number is 031-3117864 or mobile phone-0832784535 should you have any questions.

AIMS AND OBJECTIVES OF THE STUDY

The study aims to understand stress and coping strategies among cemetery workers with a view to develop guidelines on effective management of stress.

***Objectives of the study are*:**

- To identify the specific stressors unique to cemetery workers
- To explore the experience of stress among the workers
- To explore coping strategies used to deal with stress with specific reference to use of substances.
- To develop guidelines for improving working conditions of cemetery workers with regards to work stressors.
- Thank you for agreeing to take part in this project. Before we start I would like to emphasize that:
- Your participation is entirely voluntary
- You are free to answer any question
- You are free to withdraw at any time
- The interview will be kept strictly confidential and will be available only to the research team. Excerpts from the interview /individual may be made part of the

final research report, but under no circumstances will your names or any identifying characteristics be included in the report.

- Pleas sign the consent form that I have read the contents to you.

..... (Signed)

..... (Print)

..... (Date)

Please send a report on the results of the project:

Yes No (Circle one)

Address to which results should be sent:

_____

_____

_____

Ref:

14 November 2003

The Director
Cemeteries and Crematoria
Ethekwini Municipality
75 Winder Street
Durban
4001

Dear Sir

RE: PERMISSION TO CONDUCT A STUDY IN THE CEMETERIES AND CREMATORIUM

I would like to be granted permission to conduct a study in the above - mentioned areas. The topic of the study is " Understanding work related stress and substance abuse in the Cemetery worker in the Ethekwini Municipality."

The objectives of the study are in the attached research proposal. The student will conduct the study in December 2003. All participants will be asked to sign an informed consent. The results of the study will be made available to you. Should you have any queries I can be contacted at the above - mentioned address.

Thanking you in anticipation.

Your faithfully,
S. C Mzamo (Mrs)
Tel no. 031-3117864
Cell no. 0832784535

Permission Granted

Signed : ----------

Name : ----------

Date : 14 . 11 . 03