



**FACULTY OF HUMANITIES, DEVELOPMENT AND
SOCIAL SCIENCES**

Nurses experiences of Work Engagement: A qualitative study

By

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DECLARATION

I declare that this dissertation is my own, unaided work. It is being submitted for the degree of Masters of Social Science (Industrial Psychology) at the University of KwaZulu-Natal, Howard College, Durban, South Africa.

This dissertation has not been submitted before for any degree or examination at any university, nor has it been prepared under the aegis or with the assistance of any other body, or organization, or person outside the University of KwaZulu-Natal.

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ABSTRACT

South African nurses are emigrating for greater prospects abroad – a weakening of the healthcare system. Nurses play a critical role in health care globally as well as in South Africa. Work engagement or lack thereof may be the reason why so many nurses decide to emigrate. This study aimed to get a better understanding of whether nurses working more specifically with mentally and physically challenged ‘children’ experience work engagement. The focus will be on the resources and demands that nurse’s face in their work environment and whether these contribute to feelings of work engagement. A qualitative research design was used to collect data in this study. The study took the form of a cross sectional survey design with a sample of 8 nurses from a home for physically and mentally challenged individual’s in the Durban, KwaZulu-Natal region. The data was collected with the use of a biographical questionnaire and an interview schedule. The resulting data was analysed using thematic content analysis with the aid of NVIVO 9. The study found that the nurse’s do experience work engagement despite the circumstances they are exposed to. The study also found the resources the nurses were presented with aided in them experiencing work engagement. A love for their job contributed to feelings of work engagement.

Keywords: Demands, resources.

Table of contents

Cover Page	i
Declaration	ii
Acknowledgements	iii
Abstract	iv

CHAPTER ONE: INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction	1
1.2 Background and outline of research problem	2
1.3 Rationale	2
1.4 Aims	3
1.5 Research questions	4
1.6 Research problems and objectives: Broader issues to be investigated	4
1.7 Structure of dissertation	5
1.8 Conclusion	7

CHAPTER TWO: LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction	8
2.2 Positive psychology	10
2.3 Positive organisational behaviour	12
2.4 Work engagement conceptualised	14
2.5 Engagement in context	27

2.6 The Job Demands Resources Model	35
2.7 Conclusion	38

CHAPTER THREE: RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction	39
3.2 Research Design	39
3.3 Type of Sampling	41
3.4 Research Participants	41
(Table 1: Biographical Data)	42
3.5 Sample Site	42
3.6 Data Collection	43
3.7 Equipment/ Instruments used	44
3.8 Procedure	46
3.9 Data Analysis	47
3.10 Ethical Considerations	49
3.11 Conclusion	50

CHAPTER FOUR: RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

4.1 Background and context	52
4.2 Theme one: Conceptualisations and perceptions of work engagement	52
4.3 Theme two: Dichotomising emotions experienced	60
4.3.1 Positive emotion	61
4.3.2 Negative emotion in the form of stress	68

4.4 Theme three: Job demands encountered	73
4.4.1 Insufficient salary	74
4.4.2 Shortage of resources	78
4.4.3 Working with the patients	82
4.5 Theme four: Resources encountered	85
4.5.1 Social support	87
4.5.2 Family support	91
4.6 Theme Five: Reasons for job continuance	96
4.6.1 A love for the job	96
4.6.2 A love for the patients	99
4.7 Theme six: Spirituality	102
4.8 Conclusion	106
 CHAPTER FIVE: SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION	
5.1 Introduction	108
5.2 Summary	108
5.3 Research questions answered	115
5.4 Recommendations	117
5.5 Limitations	118
5.6 Conclusion	118
 REFERNCES	 120

APPENDICES

Appendix 1: Interview schedule	135
Appendix 2: Letter of informed consent	137
Appendix 3: Letter requesting permission from the organisation for the study	138
Appendix 4: Letter granting permission from the organisation for the study	139

CHAPTER ONE

INTRODUCTION

1.1 Introduction

Modern organisations are in constant need of employees who are energetic, dynamic and dedicated thus modern organisations are in search of people who are engaged with their work (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). These modern organisations expect pro-activity, initiative and responsibility for personal development from their employees as well as increased performance and productivity. Overall modern organisations expect, engaged employees who are fully involved in, and enthusiastic about their work. In light of the above it is important to note that engagement is a widely researched topic and the vast literature spans employee engagement, personal engagement and work engagement. Engagement is a part of every human's life and more specifically work engagement plays a massive and significant role in every employee's life (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Engagement and work engagement permeate and affect all areas of an individual's life and a lack thereof will lead to negative effects in other areas besides the work life of an employee. In light of the above, this chapter presents the principal aims and objectives of the research, the research questions, rationale, context of the research problem, and the limitations of the research study.

1.2 Background and Outline of Research Problem

Work engagement reflects the recent trend towards ‘positive psychology’ where the concern is positive aspects of employees’ experienced health. In particular, attention is paid to human strengths, optimal functioning, and positive experiences at work (Mauno, Kinnunen & Ruokolainen, 2006). Thus in light of this a lack of work engagement among employees negatively affects employee’s ability not just in the world of work but in other aspects of their lives. In contrast then if an employee experiences engagement this will lead to numerous positive results such as increased productivity and overall a happier worker. For the purposes of this research project there was a very precise view of engagement specifically focusing on work engagement and how nurses experience and perceive work engagement. A lack of work engagement in the work place is characterised by a high level of absenteeism as well as high levels of turnover and low levels of employee performance and productivity. This research therefore aimed to focus on nurses and their experiences and perceptions of engagement and how these experiences and perceptions are influenced by job demands and job resources in particular.

1.3 Rationale

Much of the literature on work engagement has been based on western countries and subsequently comprises a white middle-class bias. Within the South African context, research on the topic area is insufficient. In addition, most research has focused on engagement as a whole and has failed to take into account work engagement as an entity on its own. Although professionals in both the academic and clinical arena flog

engagement as an vital work-related feature, definitions and measurements of engagement at work, and more specifically nurse engagement, are inadequately understood (Simpson, 2009). Thus, a clear theoretical and practical understanding of nurse engagement or work engagement among nurse's is needed in order to prioritise and implement interventions that could be targeted towards bettering nurse performance, patient outcomes, and other core healthcare organisational outcomes. In order to build upon a potentially significant area of nurse performance research, a review of the literature examining the current state of knowledge about engagement at work will be focused on in this research (Simpson, 2009). In light of the above it can be concluded that nurse's play a crucial role in health care globally as well as in the South African context. The knowledge we gain from studies such as this could influence the type of interventions introduced so as to improve their quality of life.

1.4 Aims

The aim of this research project was to explore the current state of knowledge about work engagement. Further the aim of this research was to explore nurse's experiences and perceptions of work engagement within a children's home for mentally and physically challenged. Specifically by taking into consideration how job demands and job resources impacted on the experiences of work engagement.

1.5 Research Questions

1. How is engagement conceptualised in the literature?
2. How do nurses perceive engagement?
3. What are nurse's experiences of engagement?
4. How do job demands impact on engagement experienced by nurses?
5. How do job resources impact on engagement experienced by nurses?
6. Why do nurses remain in their work?

1.6 Research problems and objectives: Broader issues to be investigated

The nursing profession in South Africa is especially important unfortunately it is also under recognised with regards to the working conditions that nurses are faced with as well as other important issues that will be discussed later in the paper. This under recognition of the importance of the nursing sector is mainly due to the turbulent economic era that South Africa is faced with. Engagement at work has emerged as a potentially important employee performance and organisational management topic, however, the definition and measurement of engagement at work, and more specifically, nurse work engagement, is poorly understood (Simpson, 2009). Therefore, this study focused on how the demands as well as resources or rather under resourced working environment of nursing staff impacts on a nurses work engagement.

The nursing profession is characterised with high stress and work overload. Nurses are faced with prolonged and odd work hours and irregular work shifts as well as the experience of dealing with seriously ill and dying patients (Simpson, 2009). Therefore the current study aimed firstly to grasp the concept of engagement and more specifically work engagement. And then narrow it down and unearth what are nurse's feelings and emotions towards their job. And in so doing get a feel for whether nurses are engaged in their work despite the far reaching demands they are faced with on a daily basis. This study also attempted to uncover the role that resources (whether it be personal or work related) play in nurses experiencing feelings of engagement in their work. The problem that the study addresses is the lack of literature around nurses especially in the arena of work engagement. Therefore in summary this study focused on nurse's perceptions and experiences of work engagement and what keeps them in this type of highly stressful work.

1.7 Structure of the dissertation

Chapter One: Introduction

Chapter one presents the outline and background of the study as well as the context within which the study was situated. It focuses on the motivation, purpose, significance, aims, objectives as well as limitations of the study.

Chapter Two: Literature Review and Theoretical Framework

Chapter two comprises a comprehensive literature review, focusing on the nature of work engagement within the workplace, employee's perceptions and experiences of work engagement as well as the impact that job demands and resources have on the work engagement an employee experiences. Furthermore, this review draws on significant past and current research on the topic, highlighting their strengths and weaknesses. In addition, this chapter presents the principal theory upon which the research project was based, namely, the Job Demands Resources Theory. This chapter will also focus on the applicability and appropriateness of this theory to answering the research problem.

Chapter Three: Research Methodology

Chapter three highlights the research design, sampling, data collection method, research procedure, and the type of data analysis utilised for this research. The strengths and weaknesses of these techniques and their appropriateness for this study are outlined.

Chapter Four: Results and Discussion

Chapter four comprises of the presentation of results after analysis, as well as the discussion of the findings.

Chapter Five: Summary and Conclusions

Chapter five includes a summary of the results of the research, and recommendations and suggestions for further research.

1.8 Conclusion

Work engagement or a lack thereof is a prevalent problem that is present in most organisations in today's world of work. Thus, there is a serious need for this problem to be addressed as it does not only affect the employee but also the organisation in terms of productivity, performance and turnover. In this introductory chapter, the principal aims and objectives, research questions, rationale, and context of the research problem were discussed. The following chapter presents a review of literature in relation to the research objectives and questions outlined above.

CHAPTER TWO

LITERATURE REVIEW AND THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

2.1 Introduction

Work is important and central to an individual's quality of life as it provides the person with a sense of structure, status as well as purpose (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). Work is more than just a place where one goes to earn a living hence, work should be a place where one finds meaning. In today's turbulent economic conditions, organisations, as part of their cost cutting and cost saving efforts, are constantly subject to redesign (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008). When faced with issues of organisational redesign employees experience negative feelings such as uncertainty, mistrust and low work morale which essentially leads to lower levels of job satisfaction. This in turn ultimately affects productivity and organisational profitability. Work engagement is a significant concept and if embraced and developed could lead to job satisfaction and increases in productivity and profit (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

Engagement has become an important concept in organisations and a promising strategy to increase productivity however; there is a serious shortage of research on work engagement in the academic literature. This is due to the fact that only recently has the importance of work engagement been recognised in academic literature where in the past work engagement was seen as important in practice only. This therefore, creates a

knowledge gap where there is absent information to guide further research. In light of the above, this study will be focusing on the importance of work engagement and to a lesser extent how work engagement can lead to an increase in job satisfaction and increase in productivity.

The nursing profession in South Africa is especially important due to the working conditions as well as the turbulent economic era that South Africa is faced with. Work engagement has emerged as a potentially important employee performance and organisational management topic, however, the definition and measurement of engagement at work, and more specifically, nurse work engagement, is poorly understood (Simpson, 2009). Therefore, this study focused on how the demands as well as resources or rather under resourced working environment of nursing staff impacts on a nurses work engagement. The research study focused on nurses who work in a small health care practice specifically with mentally ill and challenged patients. The research asked the question do nurses experience work engagement and if so what causes this work engagement.

The Job Demands Resources (JD-R) model was used as the theoretical framework. The JD-R model is perfectly suited to this study as it takes into cognisance the demands and resources that had an influence on whether nurses experienced work engagement or not. The context in which nurse's work is characterised by intense stress and high job demands and many nurses work in poorly resourced health care institutions.

Consequently it was of great interest to uncover what factors or resources play a role in nurse's experiences of work engagement.

The objective of this paper is to examine the current state of knowledge about work engagement through a review of the available literature. The literature review begins by introducing positive psychology as the underlying framework within which work engagement exists. Positive organisational behaviour (POB) will also be discussed as POB is a relevant framework with regards to Industrial Psychology and the work setting. The discussion will then shift to a focus on conceptualising work engagement and looking at work engagement within the context of nursing staff. The literature review will conclude with the theoretical framework that will guide this research namely the job demands resource model (JD-R model).

A discussion surrounding Positive Psychology will follow.

2.2 Positive Psychology

Prior to World War II there were three central aims of psychology. These aims were to cure mental illness, to make untroubled people happier and to study genius and high talent (Seligman, Parks & Steen, 2004). However, subsequent to World War II the focus shifted and psychology largely began to focus on the first aim, to cure mental illness, and in so doing became a science concerning healing. Not overlooking that curing mental illness is an important domain however in the focus of building a strong science and practice of treating mental illness psychologists largely forgot about everyday well-being

(Seligman et al, 2004). In light of the above, the concept of a 'positive psychology' emerged and is rapidly gaining momentum in both psychology (Seligman, 1999) and organisational behaviour (Luthans, 2002a, 2002b).

"Positive psychology is the scientific study of positive experiences and positive individual traits, and the institutions that facilitate their development" (Duckworth, Steen & Seligman, 2005 p. 630). The aim of positive psychology is to "catalyse a change in the focus of psychology from preoccupation only with repairing the worst things in life to also building positive qualities. Psychology is not just the study of pathology, weakness, and damage; it is also the study of strength and virtue" (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000, p. 5). In light of this, treatment as such is not only focused on fixing what is broken but in addition and more importantly nurturing what is best (Seligman & Csikszentmihalyi, 2000). Subsequently, of great importance it can be observed that positive psychology is focused on prevention rather than cure. Thus positive psychology is focused on how to make people happier and this can be done by understanding and building positive emotions as well as and more significantly meaning and engagement. "Towards this end, we must supplement what we know about treating illness and repairing damage with knowledge about nurturing well-being in individuals and communities" (Seligman et al., 2004, p. 1379).

"The key concept in positive psychology is happiness" (Kristjansson, 2010, p. 300). "Happiness refers to the experience of a sense of joy, satisfaction and positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile" (Seligman,

2002). Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) suggest three routes to happiness, namely pleasure (the pleasant life), meaningfulness (the meaningful life) and engagement (the good life). Happiness is a key constituent of positive psychology. For the purpose of this study the route that will be focused on is engagement and of central importance is work engagement. The discussion will now move to how positive psychology is related to the work place by taking a closer look at POB.

2.3 Positive organisational behaviour (POB)

“An economy in a downward spiral, rising unemployment, anxieties about future job loss, lack of access to affordable health care, a crisis in the financial industry, and declining consumer confidence are among some of the current challenges creating significant stress in the lives of workers and their families” (Froman, 2010, p. 59). Whilst there are no quick fixes to these complex and challenging problems, if approached from the forward looking orientation of positive psychology relief can be imminent. Positive psychology suggests that “the potential for a more hopeful, productive, and satisfying future can emerge for people who are struggling to find their way through these tough times, as well as for many others who are somewhat more secure, but find themselves coasting along without much joy and meaning in their day-to-day work lives” (Froman, 2010, p. 60).

More so now than ever before it is important to take cognisance of the critical difference employees make concerning “innovation, organisational performance, competitiveness, and most importantly business success” (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 147). Organisations of today have exceeding expectations of their employees. Employees are expected “to be proactive and show initiative, collaborate smoothly with others, take responsibility for their own professional development, and to be committed to high quality performance standards” (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 147). In essence this suggests that employees should be energetic, absorbed and dedicated to their work therefore it can be concluded that engaged employees are needed. POB emerged as a radical shift away from what is known as the four D’s. The four D’s represent damage, disease, dysfunction and disorder. Therefore POB is focused on “preventing poor performance, low motivation, unwell-being, ill-health, and disengagement” (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008, p. 147).

Luthans (2002a, 2002b) coined the term Positive organisational behaviour when he recognised the need for a more relevant, proactive approach to organisational research (Wright, 2003). Luthans (2002b) defines POB as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (p. 59). In line with Luthans (2002b) thinking it is important to note that a more positive approach is not only required in psychology but also in the world of work. This meaning then that organisational members should consider cultivating positive emotions in

themselves and others, not just as end-states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving individual and organisational transformation and optimal functioning over time (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002, p.164).

The discussion that follows will have its focus on engagement and more specifically work engagement as it is conceptualised in the literature.

2.4 Work engagement conceptualised

Engagement is a broad and complex concept. One of the prominent writers in the area of engagement conceptualised what is known as personal engagement. Kahn's (1990) definition of engagement focuses on three main concepts namely meaningfulness, safety and availability. Kahn (1990) goes on to explain these three concepts as follows "the three conditions reflect the logic of actual contracts. People agree to contracts containing clear and desired benefits and protective guarantees when they believe themselves to possess the resources necessary to fulfil the obligations generated. That logic characterises people's agreements to place increasing depths of themselves into role performances. People vary their personal engagements according to their perceptions of the benefits, or the meaningfulness, and the guarantees, or the safety, they perceive in situations. Engagement also varies according to the resources they perceive themselves to have—their availability" (pg. 703). Further to personal engagement employee engagement also features prominently in the literature. Employee engagement focuses on the individual's involvement, satisfaction and enthusiasm for their work (Sridevi & Markos, 2010). In light of the vast amount of literature centring on work engagement this

study will focus on and provide an overview of work engagement. This section will begin by providing a definition of work engagement. The discussion will then move on to the psychological role of job and personal resources as the predictors of work engagement and will end with the reasons for engaged employees being more productive.

In their efforts to remain competitive and survive most organisations of today are doing so at the expense of. This is usually done through the redesigning of business processes, restructuring and downsizing. Since there is only so much an organisation can redesign and downsize it is beneficial to think creatively and innovatively by designing new approaches, in which an organisation may survive, grow and develop its work force. Subsequently, one way of doing this would be to build engagement among workers which would ultimately lead to increase in profit as will be discussed later in the paper (through the engagement – performance link). Therefore, engagement can make a momentous difference in organisations by using human capital to initiate a competitive advantage (Bakker & Schaufeli, 2008).

The concept of work engagement emerged when research on burnout shifted its focus to a more positive view resulting in the presumed parallel of burnout, work engagement. There are two main schools of thought around work engagement. The first school put forward by Maslach and Leiter (1997) proposed that burnout and engagement exist on two opposite sides of a continuum. Maslach and Leiter (1997) define burnout as “an

erosion of engagement with the job, whereby energy turns into exhaustion, involvement turns into cynicism, and efficacy turns into ineffectiveness” (p. 90). Maslach and Leiter(1997) go on to define engagement as “characterised by energy, involvement and professional efficacy, which are the direct (perfectly inversely related) opposites of the three burnout dimensions” (p. 90).

The second school of thought, which will be the core focus of the research, agrees that engagement is the positive antithesis of burnout however differs in that it defines and operationalizes engagement in its own right (Schaufeli& Bakker, 2004). Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002) define work engagement as a “positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterised by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (p. 73). Vigour can be understood as the employee’s high levels of energy as well as mental resilience that are present while they are working. Dedication can be understood as the employee being intensely involved in their work as well as feeling that the work they do is significant and challenging and due to this they are enthusiastic about their work. Absorption can be understood as the employee “being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one’s work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work” (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). These three characteristics of work engagement lead to employees who are engaged, are highly energised and enthusiastic about their work and they become so engrossed and immersed in their work that they do not realize the time spent doing work (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

In a study conducted by Schaufeli et al. (2002) among Dutch employees it was found that engaged employees are highly energetic, self-efficacious individuals who exercise influence over events that affect their lives (Schaufeli, Taris, Le Blanc, Peeters, Bakker & De Jonge, 2001). This was established when the participants indicated that once they felt like their job was no longer challenging they would change jobs and consequently move to an organisation and job that they found challenged them and offered them meaning. Therefore due to engaged employees positive attitude and activity level, they tend to create their own positive feedback with regard to appreciation, recognition and success. It was also found that the engagement, energy and enthusiasm they experienced as a result of their work transferred to outside work or activities, for example in sports, creative hobbies, and volunteer work. The feelings of tiredness engaged employees experience as a result of their work are not seen in a negative light rather they describe their tiredness as a rather pleasant state because it is associated with positive accomplishments (Schaufeli et al., 2002). Finally, engaged employees are not addicted to their work but they do enjoy their work immensely.

In an additional study conducted by Engelbrecht (2006) among Danish midwives the results complemented the study by Schaufeli et al. (2002). Engelbrecht (2006) in his study showed how engagement translates into behaviour. In the study Engelbrecht (2006) asked participants to describe a co-worker of theirs that is highly engaged. From the

responses engaged midwives being a person who “radiates energy and keeps up the spirit at the ward, especially in situations where work morale is low and frustration spreads. That is an engaged midwife is ready to do whatever needs to be done, and is seen as a source of inspiration for herself and others. She has a positive attitude towards her work and is happy for the things she is doing. The love (for her job) is expressed through the passion with which she fulfils her daily tasks” (p. 154). The engaged midwife also goes the extra mile in that in addition to her normal tasks at work she does other voluntary work around the ward.

In a study conducted by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) it emerged that positive emotion played an important role in engagement. It was found that positive emotion was a prominent feature in engaged employees. Positive emotion in this study referred to emotion such as happiness, joy and enthusiasm. It was also found that the positive emotion that leads to an employee’s engagement also has a positive outcome on employee’s job and personal resources. This is an important finding for the current study as the job demands resources model is used as the theoretical framework and special interest was paid to the resources that are available to the participants. Similarly and relating to the study by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) a study conducted by Fredrickson (2001) using the Broaden-and-build theory reveals that experiences of positive emotions can build enduring psychological resources and trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. Positive emotions not only make people feel good at the moment, but also

feel good in the future (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002). Thus it is important to take note of the role positive emotion has in building resources and impacting on resources.

Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) conducted a study among Dutch workers and found that employees whose jobs are characterised by task variety, autonomy, complexity, and supervisory support have highest levels of work engagement. Therefore people who are employed in jobs such as primary school teachers, artists, nurses, and managers experience the highest engagement levels, whereas printers, retail employees, and workers in the food processing industry experience the lowest levels of engagement. The study also found that the self-employed are the most engaged in their work and older workers are more engaged than younger workers. The discussion will now shift to the psychological role of job and personal resources as the predictors of work engagement.

Studies that have previously been conducted concerning work engagement have found that job resources, for instance the social support employees receive from their colleagues and supervisors, performance feedback, skill variety, autonomy, and learning opportunities are positively related with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Schaufeli & Bakker, (2004) define job resources as “those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that may: (a) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (b) be functional in achieving work goals; or (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (p. 296) “Hence, resources are not

only necessary to deal with (high) job demands, but they also are important in their own right” (Bakker, 2009, p. 9).

Job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role or an extrinsic motivational role. On the one hand from the perspective of the intrinsic motivational role, job resources contribute to the employee’s growth, learning as well as development. Job resources have the function of fulfilling an individual’s basic human needs. These basic human needs consist of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). On the other hand from the extrinsic motivational perspective job resources are instrumental in achieving work goals. When an employees work environment is highly resourced this leads to employees feeling the willingness to dedicate one’s efforts and abilities to the work task. When employees work in such environment they are more likely to successfully complete their task and achieve all work goals. Whether it is through the satisfaction of basic needs or through the achievement of work goals, the outcome is positive and engagement is likely to occur (Schaufeli& Bakker, 2004).

A study conducted by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) among Dutch employees working in various different companies found that there is a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement. The resources that are positively related to work engagement are performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching. “More specifically, they used structural equation modelling to show that job resources (not job demands) exclusively predicted engagement, and that engagement is a mediator of the relationship between job resources and turnover intentions” (Schaufeli& Bakker, 2004,

p.294). Hakanen, Bakker & Schaufeli (2006) replicated this study among teachers. The results from their study showed that job control, information, supervisory support, innovative climate and social climate were all positively related to work engagement. The focus of the discussion will now shift to personal resources.

It is important to take into account an individual's personal resources as research has shown that employees also tend to be engaged outside of their working environment, therefore it's important to take note of the relationship that exists between an individual's personal characteristics and their work engagement as their personal characteristics may contribute to why they are engaged at work. Personal resources as defined by successfully Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis & Jackson (2003) are positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals' sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully.

In a study conducted by Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen, and Schaufeli (2006) among Dutch employees relating work engagement to temperament and two of the big five personality factors namely neuroticism and extraversion it was found that engaged workers are characterised by high levels of mobility, low neuroticism, and high extraversion. The above illustrates that engaged workers are able to respond adequately to changes in environmental demands; they can adapt quickly to new surroundings and switch easily between activities. Engaged employees are also less likely to experience

distressing emotions such as fear, depression, and frustration that is a prominent feature of neurotics. In fact they are more cheerful, sociable and generally extroverts. In a replicated study conducted by Mostert and Rothmann's (2006) in the South African context among South African police officers it was found that conscientiousness, emotional stability, and extraversion each made an independent contribution to predicting work engagement as proven by the study conducted by Langelaan, Bakker, Van Doornen, and Schaufeli (2006). However, Mostert and Rothmann (2006) go further in indicating that employees tend to score high on conscientiousness and therefore they have the tendency to be habitually careful, reliable, hard-working, well-organised, and purposeful.

The study conducted among South African police officers by Mostert and Rothmann's (2006) also indicate that when police officers are engaged they tend to have an active coping style and therefore they take a problem-focused approach, in which they take active steps to attempt to remove or rearrange stressors. Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) conducted a study among highly skilled Dutch technicians. The study examined the role of three personal resources (self-efficacy, organisational-based self-esteem, and optimism) in predicting work engagement. The results of the study showed that engaged employees have a high self-efficacy and therefore feel that they are capable of meeting the demands that they encounter in a broad array of contexts. Additionally it was found that, engaged workers have the tendency to believe that they will generally experience good outcomes in life (optimistic), and believe they can satisfy their needs by participating in roles within the organisation.

Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) conducted a study among female school principals showed that when employees have personal resources they tend to feel more engaged when it comes to their work. More specifically it was found that resilience, self-efficacy and optimism contributed to work engagement. From this we can observe that resilience is another personal resource that facilitates work engagement, indicating that engaged workers are effective in adaptation to changing environments. Therefore engaged workers are less likely to feel anxious and are more open to experience. For example, a recent study by Bakker (2007) among bank employees illustrated that resilience buffers the impact of high emotional demands on exhaustion, and more importantly showed a positive relationship with work engagement under conditions of high job demands.

In light of the above discussion it can be noted that the main drivers of work engagement are the job resources and personal resources of an individual. Job resources are important in that they diminish the impact that job demands have on the employee's ability to achieve work goals and stimulate personal growth, learning as well as development. Additionally it is eminent that job resources have a motivational potential when employees are faced with high job demands. Importantly employees who are engaged tend to differ from other employees with regard to their personal characteristics. Therefore engaged employees tend to score higher on the personality factors such as

extraversion and conscientiousness and lower on personality factors such as neuroticism. In conclusion employees who are engaged experience more personal resources including resources such as optimism, self-efficacy, self-esteem, resilience, and an active coping style. These resources lead to engaging workers and in so doing to help workers control and impact upon their work environment successfully. The focus of the discussion will now move to how engagement is related to performance or in other words why engaged workers are more productive.

In order to illustrate the engagement performance reference will be made to previous research conducted on the relationship between performance and engagement. Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) conducted a study in which they found that when employees are engaged they receive much better ratings from their co-workers with regard to in-role and extra-role performance. This essentially means that engaged employees perform well with regard to work and are always willing to do that extra work to accomplish a positive result. In a study conducted Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) among secretaries it was found that secretaries that are engaged in their work score high on in-role and extra-role performance. Adding to this it was also found that engaged secretaries had more influence on daily business. Therefore they were more often asked to carry out additional tasks, including personnel pre-selection and other important tasks.

Xanthopoulou, Bakker, Demerouti and Schaufeli (2007) conducted a study on engagement and performance among school principals and teachers. The study found that there were positive associations between the principals work engagement scores and the ratings teachers gave of performance and leadership. In particular it was found that school principals that were engaged scored higher on in-role and extra-role performance. There was also evidence that engagement is related to creativity and this was seen where the more engaged the principal. The better they were at coming up with a variety of creative ways to work through problems experienced at work. The study also found that engaged principals were viewed as transformational leaders therefore they were seen as being able to inspire, stimulate and coach their co-workers.

From the above studies it can therefore be noted that there is a strong positive link between work engagement and performance. The discussion will now turn its focus to why engaged workers perform better.

From literature it can be summarised that there are at least four reasons for why engaged employees may perform better at work. These reasons are 1) engaged employees more often than not experience positive emotions such as happiness, joy and enthusiasm; 2) engaged employees experience better health; 3) engaged employees tend to create their own job resources and personal resources and 4) engaged employees tend to transfer their

engagement to others around them. These four reasons will now be discussed in more detail.

Firstly, pertaining to positive emotions research conducted by Salanova&Schaufeli (2008) around engagement has concluded that employees who experience engagement often experience positive emotion and therefore this may lead to the employee being more productive. When people are happy they tend to be sensitive to opportunities at work, more of an extrovert, considerate and helpful to others, as well as more confident and optimistic.

Secondly, in relation to good health research conducted has found that there is a positive relationship between engagement and health. Therefore fundamentally this means that that engaged workers are better able to perform well. Schaufeli, Taris and Van Rhenen (in press) have found that engaged workers tend to report less psychosomatic complaints than their non-engaged counterparts.

Thirdly with reference to the ability to mobilise, an important reason why engaged employees are more productive and perform better than non-engaged employees may be due to the fact that they have the ability to create their own resources. Therefore what this essentially means is that if an employee is engaged they tend to experience positive emotions and when they experience these positive emotions they build up psychological

resources. Positive emotions not only make people feel good at the moment, but also feel good in the future (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

And lastly in connection with the crossover of engagement, performance may be viewed as the result of the combined effort of individuals. “It is therefore conceivable that the crossover of engagement among members of the same work team increases performance. Crossover or emotional contagion can be defined as the transfer of positive (or negative) experiences from one person to the other” (Westman, 2001). Therefore if co-workers influence each other with regard to their work engagement, they are most likely to perform better as a team.

Therefore, from the above discussion it can be noted that there is a valuable link between engagement and performance. If organisations invest in engaging employees this may result in positive returns for the organisation in terms of increased profit. The discussion will now focus on engagement in context therefore a more detailed look at engagement within the health care setting and more specifically engagement among nurses.

2.5 Engagement in context

Work is important to our psychological functioning and part of our everyday lives. Kohn and Schooler (1983) states that work leads to improved mental flexibility and self-esteem. Applebaum (1992) suggested that “work is like the spine which structures the way

people live, how they contact material and social reality, and how they achieve status and self-esteem. Work is basic to the human condition, to the creation of the human environment, and to the context of human relationships” (pg. 92). The nursing role has been seen as one of caring, empathy, and service-orientation. The qualities nurses possess are typically seen as more characteristic of women. Hassan (2010) defines work engagement as an energetic, deep involvement with work and includes energy, involvement, and professional efficacy. Consequently, and especially pertinent among nurses, engagement confirms to an individual that they are good at doing important work. With noteworthy reference to positive psychology, the proposed antithesis to burnout, engagement, is of immeasurable significance to psychologists, practitioners as well as nurse leaders. There is a substantial volume of evidence linking organisational resources to work engagement as will be discussed later in the paper.

‘High quality of patient care is dependent on a nursing workforce that is empowered to provide care according to professional nursing standards’ (Laschinger, Wilk, Cho & Greco, 2009, p. 637). Freaney and Tiernan (2009) assert that nursing is an occupation that is inherently stressful. Nurses are confronted with suffering, death and grief on a daily basis, while, at the same time, performing certain tasks that could only be described as mundane. Consequently, nurses have long been associated and plagued with the experience of burnout. Additionally, given that nurses typically represent the largest percentage of employees at medical institutions their role in medical care is remarkably imperative and becoming more so in relation to the turbulent economy and shortage of

nursing staff (Jenaro, 2010). In their professional capacity, nurses provide care to patients. Due to the high physical and mental demands of their profession, they run a high risk of health symptoms and burnout (Tomic&Tomic, 2010). The job of a nurse is deemed to be quite stressful as it requires prolonged and odd work hours and irregular work shifts. Among other things, nurses experience a high level of physical load in dealing with seriously ill and dying patients. The physical workload, particularly handling and lifting patients, often requires close contact with people in need of medical and emotional support (Tomic&Tomic, 2010).

Work engagement among nurses has the potential to result in positive outcomes for nurses, patients and the institution in which the nurses are employed. In spite of this, the nursing work environment is currently characterised by heavy workloads and high levels of stress which is ultimately leading to burnout and illness related absenteeism. This threatens not only the health of nurses but of patients and the institution in which they are employed. Subsequently, for success in the nursing profession in the future it is advisable that creative ways are developed to create a high quality work environment that is characterised by work empowerment and work engagement which will ultimately lead to job satisfaction (Laschinger et al., 2009).

Hassan (2010) conducted a study among nurses. His study aimed at investigating whether or not there were differences in the level of engagement between male nurses and female

nurses. Therefore he focused on whether gender had an effect on levels of work engagement. Hassan (2010) found that there were differences in the patterns of engagement between male and female nurses. The difference was due to male nurses not knowing what is expected of them at work. In another study conducted by Blizzard (2002) the findings were contradictory therefore the findings in this study were that the only differentiator was that of having a best friend at work. Male nurses and female nurses exhibit similar responses to items relating to the day-to-day aspects of the job, such as having the opportunity to do what they do best every day, knowing what is expected of them at work, and having the materials and equipment to do their jobs right.

In a study conducted by Freeney and Tiernan (2009) the aim was to explore nurses' experiences of their work environments and to reveal factors in the workplace that may facilitate or act as barriers to nurse engagement. It was found that facilitators of and barriers to engagement centre around six areas of organisational life, namely; workload, control, reward, fairness, community and values. In essence it was found that interventions aimed at fostering engagement are called for and through future research in the area of engagement, it is believed that nurses will gain increased positive experiences from their work and subsequently a greater sense of well-being (Freeney&Tiernan, 2009).

In a study conducted by Greco, Laschinger and Wong (2006) they stated that the efforts to improve working conditions for nurses is critical to retaining nurses as well as attracting newcomers into the field. The stress that nurses experience as a result of their working environment has been identified as a major cause of burnout among nurses. Burnout is on the opposite end of the continuum with regards to engagement. Therefore engagement is the positive antipode of burnout. The nursing leaders has been found play an important role in creating a positive working environment for nurses and this can have a significant impact on how the nurses respond to their environment as well as the quality of health care they provide to their patients.

In a study supplementing and in addition to the previous one Laschinger, Wilk, Cho and Greco (2009) investigated the impact that empowering working conditions have on nurses work engagement and effectiveness. They went further in that they compared the results between newly graduated nurses and experienced nurses. The findings from their study suggest that work engagement significantly mediated the empowerment/effectiveness relationship in both groups however the impact of work engagement seemed to be stronger for the more experienced nurses. Therefore they concluded that engagement is a significant mechanism by which empowerment affects nurses feelings of effectiveness and further that this is less important for newly graduated nurses. This has an implication for management in that management needs to be aware of the role that empowerment plays in promoting work engagement and effectiveness and how this differentiates between newly graduated nurses and more experienced nurses.

In a study conducted in South Africa by Van der Colff and Rothmann (2009) among registered nurses they highlighted the importance the nursing profession. They further went on to say that nursing is seen as a stressful and emotionally demanding profession which means that nurses are more susceptible to burnout. They state that the tasks that nurses perform at work are extremely demanding as they work with grief, suffering and death. Engaged employees view themselves as competent to deal with demands that they face in their job. Therefore nurses who are engaged are energetic and have a sense of connection with their work activities (Van der Colff and Rothmann, 2009).

Vallerand and Houliort (2003) conducted research around passion and the love a person has for their job and the impact this has on work engagement. Passion can be defined as “a strong inclination towards an activity that people like, that they find important and in which they invest time and energy” (Vallerand and Houliort, 2003, p. 175). The authors distinguish two types of passion namely obsessive and harmonious passion. For the purposes of this study harmonious passion is relevant. Harmonious passion refers to “an autonomous internalisation that leads individuals to choose to engage in an activity they like”. (Vallerand and Houliort, 2003, p. 175). In light of the above if an individual has passion toward their work it may be likely to lead to an adaptive result. The definition of passion which touches on activity valuation, time and energy expenditure as well as the liking a person has for a task are all associated with work engagement as can be seen from the definition of work engagement provided previously (vigour, dedication,

absorption). Thus through a passion for ones work there is investment and work engagement.

Engagement is an important factor in job continuance. If an individual does not feel that they are engaged to the work they may decide that they do not want to continue in this job. In light of this in a study conducted by Mackoff and Triolo (2008) it was found that nurses in that organisation remained in their work because they love working with the patients and therefore have a love for the patients. This study went further to state that these nurses view their work as a calling. This indicates just how dedicated the nurses really are despite the stressful and demanding nature of their job.

Several lines of research in organisational behaviour and social psychology have dealt with having a calling and differently named, but closely related, constructs. One of these constructs is work engagement and its related concept flow. In this case work engagement and flow which examine human experiences on an episodic basis through focusing on people's subjective experience of a particular task or activity at a specific moment in time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 1999). Thus different studies view a calling differently. Some studies believe that having a calling is something that is religious and involves Christianity whilst other studies do not relate having a calling to religion however does acknowledge that having a calling is a partly religious occurrence. Literature has shown that 'having a calling' may lead an individual to be more engaged in their work.

In a study conducted by Dobrow (n.d) it was found that when people have a calling, they feel a sense of destiny about engaging in a particular type of work. This essentially means that according to literature if individuals feel that they have a calling to do a specific type of work this leads to them being engaged in their work. This is the result as they are not doing the work for the sake of work or for the money but because they have a higher purpose and in this case the purpose is a calling and God.

Of noteworthy importance are the shortcomings that exist in the field of engagement with specific reference to the nursing profession (Simpson, 2009). The first short coming is of considerable importance as it takes into consideration the fact that there are different construct definitions of work engagement. Consequently, resulting in different measures and lines of study (Jenaro, 2010). Secondly and of equal importance is that it is essential to differentiate between a construct's defining characteristics and its antecedents. Thirdly, there are various models that attempt to identify the key factors impacting nurse engagement such as the job demands resources model which is being used in this study (Jenaro, 2010). This may be a short coming as several important work environment variables may not be included for example length of work shift. Therefore, it is important that nursing research not limit the work environment to what these established models offer (Simpson, 2009). Lastly it is imperative that the scope of engagement- based nursing research should be broadened to include various work settings (i.e. acute care, long-term care) and types of nursing staff for example a registered nurses (Simpson,

2009). The discussion will now move on to focus on the theoretical framework which will be used namely the job demands resources model.

2.6 The Job Demand Resources Model (JD-R model)

The main assumption pertaining to the JD-R model is that “whereas every occupation may have its own specific risk factors associated with job stress, these factors can be classified in two general categories (i.e. job demands and job resources), thus constituting an overarching model that may be applied to various occupational settings, irrespective of the particular demands and resources involved” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). Job demands can be described as either physical, psychosocial, social or organisational factors of a job “that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). High pressures at work, poor working conditions and emotionally demanding interactions with clients can all be characterised as job demands. Not all job demands are negative however when a job demand turns into a stressor whilst meeting the demand then this may be negative.

Job resources on the other hand are the physical, psychological, social or organisational factors that contribute to achieving work goals, reduce the demands from the job as well as the physiological and psychological costs and lastly to contribute to stimulating personal growth, learning and development of the employee. It is important to note that

resources are not only important in conjunction with demands but are important on their own as well. Resources lead to the achievement of or protection of other resources. Resources can be located at many different levels including “the level of the organisation at large (e.g. pay, career opportunities, job security), the interpersonal and social relations (e.g. supervisor and co-worker support, team climate), the organisation of work (e.g. role clarity participation in decision making), and at the level of the task (e.g. skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, performance feedback)” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313).

A second important assumption related to the JD-R model is that there “are two different underlying psychological processes that play a role in the development of job strain and motivation” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 314). In the first process which is known as the health impairment process jobs that are poorly designed or chronic job demands such as work overload may cause exhaustion in an employee’s mental and physical resources and this may lead to a decrease in energy as well as health problems.

The second process is the motivational process. This process assumes that job resources have a motivational nature and can lead to high work engagement. The definition of job resources suggests that job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role in that they help in fostering employees growth learning and development or they may play an extrinsic motivational role in that they are the catalyst in achieving work goals.

The interaction between job resources and job demands will now be discussed. The JD-R model suggests that the interaction that exists between job demands and job resources is significant for the expansion of job strain and motivation. Job resources have an inherent need to buffer the impact of job demands on job strain. The JD-R model goes beyond other models in that it “states that different types of job demands and job resources may interact in predicting job strain. Which job demands and resources play a role in a certain organisation and a certain job function depends upon the specific job characteristics” (Demerouti & Bakker, 2007, p. 3).

The fourth proposition of the JD-R model is that job resources particularly influence motivation or work engagement when job demands are high. This represents the coping hypothesis (Bakker, Hakanen, Demerouti & Xanthopoulou, 2007). To illustrate, Bakker et al. (2007) tested this hypothesis in a sample of Finnish teachers. The study demonstrated that supervisor support, innovativeness, information, appreciation, and organisational climate can all be considered important job resources for teachers because each of these conditions was able to buffer the negative impact of pupil misbehaviour on work engagement. The findings suggest that it was predicted job resources are most beneficial in maintaining work engagement under conditions of high job demands.

In another study conducted by Schaufeli, Bakker & Van Rhenen (2009) among telecom managers it was found that when there are increases in the job resources this predicts

engagement. It was also found that there is a positive gain spiral in that initial work engagement predicts an increase in job resources, which, in its turn, further increases work engagement.

2.7 Conclusion

In conclusion, from the above discussion around employee engagement it can be noted that in order for organisations to remain competitive they need to invest in their human capital by being creative and innovate and finding ways of engaging employees in their work (Sridevi & Markos, 2010). Engaged employees experience job satisfaction which in turn results in an increase in productivity. Engagement is especially important within the nursing profession as patient's health and lives are at risk. Therefore if nurses are not engaged the safety of patients is on the line. The above discussion has shown how resources and demands in the working environment have a great impact on the engagement of the worker. The discussion has also brought to the forefront aspects such as spirituality and passion which are becoming more prevalent in the literature as aspects that can be used to increase engagement in employees. The sections that follow will detail the steps that led to the findings as well as an in-depth discussion about the results of the research.

CHAPTER THREE

RESEARCH METHODOLOGY

3.1 Introduction

The associations with regard to the methodological principles are offered in this chapter, principally focusing on the tools and techniques utilised in the research process. The type of research design, sampling, data collection method, research procedure, data analysis and ethical considerations are discussed. Further, the strengths and weaknesses of these techniques and their appropriateness for this study are outlined.

3.2 Research Design

The intent of research is to uncover answers to a problem or theorise and conceptualise a problem through the application of methods, techniques and procedures that are valid, reliable and unbiased within a specific paradigm (Kumar, 1999). In line with this intent for this research, the qualitative approach or methodology was selected and in keeping with this semi- structured interviews were conducted. “Qualitative research is multi-method in focus, involving an interpretive, naturalistic approach to its subject matter” (Mertens, 1998, p. 159). The use of a qualitative design allows the researcher to interact with participants in order to uncover rich, valuable, quality, in depth material as opposed to simply quantifying the problem and reducing it to numbers (Marshall & Rossman,

2006). The qualitative approach, in addition, allows us to understand the broader social, cultural, psychological, economic and political contexts within which the research questions are entrenched (Ulin, Robinson, Tolley, & McNeill, 2002). The qualitative research design studies people and events in their natural settings in order to make sense thereof by looking at the meaning people bring (Mertens, 1998). This is a useful method as people's experiences and perceptions are given so the researcher can get a full understanding of the meaning that they attach to the subject. Therefore, this method is useful when the researcher is looking for more than a one word answer as well as feelings and experiences which are rich in emotion and feeling. In line with the above the case study method was selected. This method is advantageous as it permits the researcher to make comparisons across participants within the same organisation. According to Berg (2001), "...the case method is an extremely useful technique for researching relationships, behaviours, attitudes, motivations, and stressors in organisational settings" (p.233). While qualitative research provides an in-depth understanding about a particular phenomenon based on a relatively small sample, generalisability and reliability of the findings are limited (Patton, 1990). The validity of qualitative studies is to a large extent dependent on the competence, integrity and methodological skill of the researcher (Patton, 1990). To address the research questions a qualitative approach to the research was adopted.

3.3 Type of Sampling

Sampling refers to the calculation or measurement of a part of the total population (Larson & Faber, 2000). For the purposes of this study, a non-probability sampling technique was selected and a purposive sample was nominated from a single organisation. . Non-probability sampling can be defined as “any kind of sampling where the selection of elements is not determined by the statistical principle of randomness” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The purposive sampling method entails the selection of a sample based on “not only on availability and willingness to participate, but that cases that are typical of the population are selected” (Terre Blanche & Kelly, 1999). The purposive sampling method was selected as the researcher was interested in studying a specific population. In this research study the researcher looked specifically for nurses employed in a health care institution that specialises in mentally challenged patients. Therefore, for the researcher the purposive sampling technique was the most appropriate method to supply the researcher with these subjects. Further, this sampling method was also used due to time and financial constraints.

The sample will ensure that the following criteria will be met:

1. The individual must be an employee of the health care institution working as a nurse.

3.4 Research Participants

This study comprised 8 participants. All 8 participants met the research criterion for selection that is all participants were nurses employed in the selected organisation.

Table 1: Biographical Data

	Age	Race	First language	Marital status	Length of service
Participant 1	20	Coloured	English	Single	8 months
Participant 2	43	African	Zulu	Married	22 years
Participant 3	51	African	Zulu	Single	19 years
Participant 4	52	African	Zulu	Married	25 years
Participant 5	50	African	Zulu	Widowed	23 years
Participant 6	32	African	Zulu	Married	1 year
Participant 7	65	African	Zulu	Married	14 years
Participant 8	47	African	Zulu	Married	2 months

3.5 Sample Site

This research was conducted at a home for mentally and physically disabled children and adults located in Durban. The organisation was founded in 1965 and is home to 80 mentally and physically disabled children and adults ranging from one year to sixty five years. Further the organisation caters for a range of mental and physical disabilities including, down syndrome, autism, paralysis. The organisation is a non-profit organisation and relies on donations and a government allowance to sustain itself. The

organisation has approximately 30 staff members, with nursing staff been the largest component.

3.6 Data Collection

Semi-structured interviews were carried out using an interview schedule developed by the research based on the literature review and research questions (Appendix 1). Fundamentally, an interview schedule is a compilation of open-ended questions that the researcher intends to ask the participants (Huysamen, 2001). The use of semi-structured interviews allowed the researcher to access information from the point of view of the individual interviewee (Patton, 1990). A set of prearranged questions were asked to all interviewees as per the interview schedule. The researcher asked the questions in a systematic way. Through the permitted use of unscheduled probing questions, the researcher was able to access a deeper level of understanding of each participant's experiences (Berg, 2001; Huysamen, 2001). The interview questions were not fixed; especially when the researcher felt probing was needed in order to gain clarity or deeper understanding.

“The types of questions an interviewer asks, and the way they listen to and interpret the answers they are given, undoubtedly shape the nature of the knowledge produced” (Mason, 2002, p.231). The open-ended nature of the questions allowed respondents to express their views and explain their responses in their own words thereby giving an emotional and creative response (Foster & Parker, 1995). The aim of the research was to

explore nurses perceptions of work engagement therefore semi-structured interviews were the most appropriate method for eliciting this information. Semi-structured interviews and an interview schedule were used so that each participant could be guided through the same procedure (Patton, 1990). This reduced the possibility of bias and kept the data more organised thus making data analysis easier (Patton, 1990). Semi-structured interviews are also advantageous as their adaptability and flexibility help to maintain the naturalness of the interview (Patton, 1990).

3.7 Equipment/Instruments used

The data was collected through the use of two instruments namely a biographical questionnaire and a semi- structured interview. The biographical questionnaire captured information relating to the participant's age, gender, marital status and the time period the participant had been working in the organization as a nurse. The biographical questionnaire was used to contextualize and interpret findings more meaningfully in terms of whether engagement was experienced differently based on employee age and duration in which employees were employed in the health care institution.

The proposed study used one-on-one semi-structured interviews. Semi structured interviews are interviews in which there are set questions however, they are open ended and allows space for deviation from the question. This means the researcher can get an understanding of the participant's perspective on the subject as well as their feelings on

the subject (Van der Riet&Durrheim, 2006). During the interviewing process the researcher prompted the participants to engage in discussion on the questions that are asked related to the participant's experiences of engagement. The interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone.

With qualitative and semi-structured interviews there are certain criteria that need to be taken into account namely, credibility, transferability, dependability and conformability. Credibility refers to making sure that the results of the qualitative research are credible from the perspective of the participant's since only the participant's perspective is given (Wong, 1997). Transferability refers to whether the results of the qualitative research can be transferred to other settings or contexts (Wong, 1997). Dependability refers to the researcher acknowledging that research contexts are always changing and that if the study is repeated the results may not be identical due to changing contexts (Wong, 1997). Confirmability refers to how other researchers may confirm the results of the research by bringing their own perspective to the research (Wong, 1997) Confirmability is the parallel to objectivity therefore the influence of the researcher's judgment is minimized (Mertens, 1998). The researcher ensured that these criteria were met.

There are various ways in which an interview can be recorded (Blaxter, Hughes & Tight, 1998). For the purposes of this research, the interviews were audio recorded using a tape recorder. Tape recording is considered to be the most efficient and effective method as

the researcher focuses her attention on the participant rather than rapidly taking notes which can be distracting (Blaxter et.al., 1998; Marshall & Rossman, 2006). However, recording the interview may make participants feel anxious leading to a reluctance to talk about confidential and contentious issues (Blaxter et al., 1998). Thus the researchers explained to the participants why the interviews will be recorded and assured them of confidentiality and anonymity.

3.8 Procedure

The researcher obtained special permission from the management of the organisation for access; to the site and to obtain a sample to conduct research. This was done through an email that the researcher sent to the organisation (Appendix 3). Further, the researcher provided the management of the organisation with an overview of the study, on the basis of this presentation the researcher obtained permission to undertake the study at the health care institution (Appendix 4). On obtaining approval from the organisation, the researcher requested an organogram that provided the researcher with information pertaining to the number of employees in the health care institution as well as job title and gender of each employee. Upon receipt of the information using the purposive sampling technique employees were identified by the researcher to participate in the study. On finalisation of the sample selection the researcher provided a brief overview to the identified participants of the purpose of the study, what the study entailed, their roles in terms of participation in the study and importantly the issues surrounding confidentiality as well as anonymity. After the briefing all of the identified participants

that were keen to participate in the study and subsequently were informed of the time and date that the interviews were to take place. An informed consent letter (Appendix 2) was also presented to each participant prior to the study. Data collection took place over a period of approximately two weeks whereby the researcher conducted the one on one interviews with the identified participants. The one on one interview were conducted during a time which was appropriate to both the employee and employer. The interviews took place in a quiet room at the premises of the health care institution to avoid distraction and external interference. The rationale for the choice of venue was that participants would be more comfortable and willing to participate in a familiar environment. The interviews were approximately 45 minutes long in duration and were audio recorded using a tape recorder. The participants were assured that the recordings were confidential and would be available only to myself and my supervisor. After the interviews were completed, the recordings were transferred onto a USB memory device. This was done to enhance the quality of the recording for simple and accurate retrieval of information.

3.9 Data Analysis

As mentioned above, interviews were recorded using a Dictaphone and each one on one interview was then be transcribed by the researcher and the data generated from the interview responses by participants was analysed using the thematic content analysis approach. Thematic content analysis is a descriptive presentation of qualitative data (Anderson, 2007). “The researcher groups and distils from the texts a list of common

themes in order to give expression to the communality of voices across participants” (Anderson, 2007, p. 30). The researcher attempts to find a common underlying theme from the participant’s responses to the research questions. However this is not the main objective of research. The researcher will also be trying to find how participants think differently about the topic. Therefore the individuality and uniqueness of the participant’s responses are also important.

The analysis of data in essence entails the recording, transcribing, and organisation of raw data into manageable, convenient and meaningful units for efficient interpretation (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Data collected during the interviews were transcribed verbatim and pseudonyms were used to protect the anonymity of the participants. Data analysis relies primarily on the context in which the data are relayed (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The data were reviewed within a week after collection to ensure that important inferences were easily remembered and recalled. The data was analysed using the seven step analytic procedure outlined by Marshall and Rossman (2006). Within each step, the data was reduced into more manageable and coherent meanings or interpretations. The first step involved organising the data, with the assistance of a computer, into logical and manageable findings including all observations about the process. The second phase involved immersion in the data. This process entailed the constant reading and re-reading of the transcript in an attempt to gain familiarity with the findings of the study, thus facilitating meaningful interpretation. As highlighted by Marshall and Rossman (2006) the analytic process requires the researcher active involvement, understanding, and attention to the data, as well as an acceptance of the

apparent diversity in social conditions. The third phase involved moulding categories and themes, whereby similar ideas and beliefs in the study were grouped together (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). The fourth phase involved the coding of the data, whereby data are demarcated according to specific codes. The coding process was facilitated by the use of NVIVO 9. NVIVO 9 is software that is used and intended to help researchers organise and analyse non-numerical or unstructured data. The NVIVO software allows researchers to classify, sort and arrange information; examine relationships in the data; and combine analysis with linking, shaping, searching and modelling. The fifth phase comprised writing analytic notes. According to Marshall and Rossman (2006), it is important to note that this step should be conducted throughout the research study as it assists with the researcher's general understanding of the data in addition to offering a reflection on the findings. The sixth step entailed offering interpretations, thereby bringing meaning, structure, coherence and significance to the study by forming patterns of relationships between themes (Marshall & Rossman, 2006). Finally the seventh step involved validation and comparison of the data found to previous research studies. Plausible explanations and evidence of the findings were offered. Through the referral to other studies, the researcher has a more in-depth understanding of the transcript.

3.10 Ethical Consideration

Due to the sensitive nature of the topic, anonymity of participants was assured and pseudonyms were used during the data analysis and report writing. The data collected from the study were confidential and only available to the researcher and research

supervisor. The participants were informed that the transcripts would be recorded onto a USB memory device and safely stored. Informed consent was obtained from each participant. Participation in the research was on a purely voluntary basis and participants were free to withdraw from the study whenever they wished, without reprehension by the researcher. As the researcher is currently a student, the supervisors would not be pressured by any relationship of authority, which might have coerced them to participate.

3.11 Conclusions

This chapter highlighted the manner in which this research was conducted. Qualitative methodology was employed and semi-structured interviews were conducted. A non-probability convenience sample, comprising nine participants, was selected from a single organisation. Thematic analysis was used to analyse the data. The results and discussion of the findings are presented in the next chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The research conducted, highlighted and brought to the forefront critical emergent themes pertaining to and intertwined in nurse's experiences of work engagement. Fundamentally six crucial and pertinent themes emerged from the data that was obtained. Each of these themes will be discussed in detail below. The themes that emerged are as follows:

- Perceptions of and conceptualisations of work engagement
- Dichotomising emotions experienced
- Demands faced in the work environment
- Resources encountered
- Reasons for job continuance
- Spirituality

Several of the themes mentioned above include sub themes which improve on the explanation and discussion of the results of the study. However, with that stated, before the results and discussion ensue a succinct but brief background to the research context will be presented. The brief background is intended to provide for a better-quality explanation of the emergence of certain themes and the importance these themes elucidate.

4.1 Background and context

The nursing profession is characterized with high stress and work overload. Nurses are faced with prolonged and odd work hours and irregular work shifts as well as the experience of dealing with seriously ill and dying patients. The nursing profession in South Africa is particularly vulnerable and demanding in that nurse's in SA are faced with demanding working conditions and a range of other particularly depressing demands. This situation is exacerbated in the organisation in which this research was conducted. The research was conducted in an organisation which is to begin with a non-profit organisation. The organisation is home to mentally and physically handicapped individuals. The individuals, who range from babies to adults of the age sixty five, are considered to be children due to their handicap. The nurse's that work in this organisation work shifts which include day shifts and night shifts. The work they do is extremely important for the wellbeing as well as survival of these patients. The above information should be held in reserve when the results and discussion are analysed.

4.2 Theme one: Conceptualisations and perceptions of work engagement

Earlier in this research project a definition of work engagement to be used for the purposes of this research was detailed. Accordingly in light of this, Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002) define work engagement as a“positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigour, dedication, and absorption” (p. 73). Vigour can be understood as the employee's high levels of energy as well as mental resilience that are present while they are working. Dedication can be understood as the

employee being intensely involved in their work as well as feeling that their work is significant and challenging and due to this they are enthusiastic about their work. Absorption can be understood as the employee 'being fully concentrated and happily engrossed in one's work, whereby time passes quickly and one has difficulties with detaching oneself from work' (Schaufeli et al., 2002, p. 74). These three characteristics of work engagement lead to employees who are engaged, are highly energised and enthusiastic about their work that they become so engrossed and immersed in their work that they do not realise the time spent doing work (May, Gilson & Harter, 2004).

The current research study found that considering most of the participants mentioned that English was not their first language they clearly understood what was meant when a definition of work engagement was made available to them. The participants not only understood what work engagement is but went on to define work engagement in their own words to illustrate their understanding. When asked by the researcher what the participants understood by the term work engagement participants went on to explain as follows.

Participant one explained as follows:

“Work Engagement I can define it as to be work involvement to be duty bound to be involved in the work that you are assigned to do. As I am saying the work that you are assigned to do it needs your concentration so be involved in your work so

for example let's say I am stationing you here I don't expect you to be moving around. Because you should be engaged in this position so you should not neglect the work that has been given to you. I can use the example of an engaged couple. As a man if you are engaged you should not have or look for another girlfriend. Because now I am bound to you. I promised marriage to you. I cannot be looking at others. Like this work engagement means focusing on his or her work he cannot be distracted and be doing other things. Work engagement is also about emotion and feelings towards your work. The work that you are doing the point I am making is that you have to love your work especially in order to be a perfectionist. So you cannot do work that you do not like. And when using the word emotion we can also talk about sympathy. In this type of job it is important to sympathize with these children for the condition they find themselves in. This is god's creation so if now you show sympathy to these children it shows that you have got emotions".

Participant two went on to define work engagement as follows:

"What I think is we come here and we dedicate ourselves, we come here we forget our families, we have to be with the children we have to be their family. And we working we have to work together. Uhhh if we work together and we work hard and put our hearts in it the work is done. Enthusiasm must be there. We can't even see the time that passes by when we working hand in hand. I think Work engagement if we come together work as a team engage ourselves to what we are

doing and we must uhh the kids see us as their mum and I think engagement means you are enthusiastic. If ever I am off I get so happy on the day I come back to see the kids. I am enthusiastic. Sometimes I am sitting with my family and I am telling them about the children and what they do. I miss the kids even when I am at home. Get so happy I think today I am going to do my job I am going to make them happy”.

Participant four went on to explain work engagement in terms of happiness. Her definition is as follows:

“How you like your job. How you do your job. You must be happy if you are doing your job. You mustn’t just work but inside you are not happy. You must enjoy what you are doing. I think that when you work it must make your life seem full. What I am doing I am doing with all my heart. What I am doing I feel. When I am working with the children I feel I am trying to help. I am trying to make everybody to feel. When talking about working with children I want to make people feel and they must want to try to help”.

Participant five defined work engagement as follows:

“I would say work engagement is like, how do you get along with people in your environment then. Always show a positive attitude towards them and stuff, like be like more involved with them and how you work that specific position that you

got”.

Participant Six went on to give the following understanding of work engagement:

“I feel like something can happen but because I am focusing too much on my work I didn’t see it. The way I like my job. This work is challenging but I enjoy this work sometimes you even forget you have family. It is good because you tell yourself if I am doing this I am doing this I will see to anything else after. It also means that I am happy that I am working. I am focusing to my work. I know what I am doing if I stand up and do something. I tell myself this is what I have to do then I do it. On my side I think Work Engagement is to focus what you doing and what you coming for and where you coming from and where you are now. You have to tell yourself I have to do my work that is what I am. And to be happy about what you are doing. I am focused. For example when it comes to giving medication I know how important this is so I take even an hour to do this because I enjoy it. I want to see the children happy and healthy. I even go into the kitchen to check that the food that they are making is nice. I also want the children to eat nice food”.

Participant seven provided the following definition of work engagement:

“I am understanding that if I am working for this company how I am happy to be working. If I am coming from home to work I forget everything about what is

happening to my house and whatever, to my family. When I come to work my mind and my interest is here. I am coming to help. I am coming to feed these children they can't help themselves. I am so happy. Even after hours sometimes it's over I can't even see the time because I'm so interested in my work. All must be right and left right. So no I'm not rushing to go home. Most of the time my mind is here. I am happy to work here if the child is crying I can put my bag down and go and ask her why she is crying. My mind and interest is with them”.

In conclusion to the quotes participant eight provides the following understanding of work engagement:

“I love the work that I'm doing. I like my job and that I like what I am doing. So that I try by all means to understand all these babies here and know what they need. Sometimes there are challenges. But I must keep on smiling. I like my work”.

Eight participants were interviewed; each of the participants provided their own understanding of what they consider work engagement to be. From the quotes above it can be noted that there are commonalities in the understandings given by the participants. These will be discussed shortly. It is also evident that all participants indicate that they not only understand what work engagement is but of greater significance and substance they experience work engagement as well. The reasons explaining and detailing why the

participants in this study experience work engagement, despite the challenges faced, will come to light in the preceding themes.

The definition presented and agreed upon as the definition to be applied in this study by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002) detail three main concepts. These concepts are vigour, dedication and absorption. The definition significantly states that for work to be engaging it must be positive and fulfilling. As a result when considering this definition of work engagement it can be seen that the findings of the current study has support in the literature pertaining to work engagement.

For example when comparing the understanding produced by the participants pertaining to work engagement with the definition provided by Schaufeli, Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002) it is evident that there is consensus. Firstly there is consensus with regard to the three concepts namely vigour, dedication and absorption. The participants interviewed agree that in order for an individual to be engaged in their work they are required to be enthusiastic and energetic about their work and this is expressed in the results when the participants say enthusiasm is important when conducting work.

The second concept dedication is expressed and experienced when the participants state that they get so involved and focused on their work that they are doing. It is not easy to

distract them from the work they are performing. Therefore this highlights and corresponds to the concept of dedication.

The third concept absorption has more support among the participants than the first two in that most of the participants stated that firstly they believe an individual needs to be absorbed in their work fully. But more importantly they go on to state that they themselves get so absorbed in their work that they often forget everything else around them such as their family and they focus solely on their work it often occurs that they forget the time they spend doing their work because they are so absorbed in their work. The participants went on to say that they it is difficult for them to leave work as they will always find something important that needs to be done and they end up staying at work later than required of them.

One of the participants went on to further explain that they feel that work engagement is also experienced when an individual's work is fulfilling, this is supported by the definition that is provided by Salanova, González-Romá & Bakker (2002). Further we see that many of the participants use the word emotion and more specifically positive emotion such as happiness and love when they described work engagement this ties in with the first part of the definition of work engagement which states that work engagement is a positive fulfilling work related state of mind. However, the current study further elaborates by specifying exactly what type of positive emotion is experienced

namely happiness and love. Therefore it can be noted that the current study does add to the field of work engagement.

In conclusion various studies identified various definitions for work engagement. For the purposes of the current research the definition provided by Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002) was used as the overarching definition as well as the definition on which the research questions were based. From the above discussion it can be seen that the current study corresponds with the literature surrounding work engagement. The ways in which the participants defined as well as experienced work engagement is supported by the definition provided by Salanova, González-Romá& Bakker (2002). Furthermore and of more significance it can be seen from the results that the participants do in fact experience work engagement in this highly demanding and stressful environment. The participants experienced work engagement due to the positive emotions that they experienced.

4.3 Theme two: Dichotomising emotions experienced

Principally from the previous theme and with regard to the literature review presented earlier it can be observed that happiness is a key constituent of positive psychology. In pursuing the above statement it is important to acknowledge in order to experience workengagement emotions such as happiness, satisfaction, enjoyment and pleasure in ones work need to be experienced. “Happiness refers to the experience of a sense of joy,

satisfaction and positive well-being, combined with a sense that one's life is good, meaningful and worthwhile" (Seligman, 2002). Peterson, Park and Seligman (2005) suggest three routes to happiness, namely pleasure (the pleasant life), meaningfulness (the meaningful life) and engagement (the good life). In light of this, as mentioned numerous times the focus of this study is on engagement and in particular work engagement.

The current research found that people experienced dichotomising emotions. Therefore, the participants experienced both positive and negative emotions with regard to their work. The reason for this will be explained and will become clear in preceding themes. It is important to note that emotions do not occur in a vacuum and factors such as relationships, environment and communication impact on ones emotions (Saarni, 1998). This means that one's experiences and perceptions of work engagement are impacted not only by intrinsic factors but extrinsic factors as well such as the environment and people with whom they work.

4.3.1 Positive emotion

The first sub theme *positive emotion* or the participant's experiences of a positive emotional state highlights the positive emotions the participant experiences as a result of work. Eight participants were interviewed regarding their experiences of work engagement. Seven of the eight participants detailed their experiences of positive

emotional states and in so doing expressed that they do in fact experience work engagement. It is important to note that although the one participant did not detail positive emotional states he still did state that he experienced work engagement.

Below are the participant's experiences of positive emotional state.

Participant two explained:

“We come here because we like it we feel that we have to help these children you know. You must have the heart for it. I'm feeling good because it teaches me a lot. These people in here need my help. They suffered. We look for fancy jobs and forget about these kids who need us”.

Similarly in another extract participant three stated:

“You must have a passion your heart always must be concentrated on your work and you must love your work and what problem you got you must put it separate everything what you doing here you add work now your happiness you must be happy at work your enjoyment at work because actually we spending a lot of time at work it's the place where you spending a lot of time many hours so you have to enjoy yourself you must keep yourself loved. I love my job. Love your work and enjoy your work”.

Participant five went on to say:

“When I come here I’m in a positive attitude and I’m like that the whole day and that positive attitude runs off on someone else if they having a bad day I can help them”.

Participant six explained as follows:

“Yes I am happy. I feel that I can do everything what they tell me to. I am willing to do anything what they ask me to do. I also feel very involved. I involve myself in whatever I need to. Especially with the children. I involve myself no matter here they have to ask me to go. I am enthusiastic about what I am doing. I like to feel I am doing something good”.

Participant seven goes on to say:

“I enjoy my work.I am understanding that if I am working for this company I am happy to be working”.

Whilst lastly participant eight reveals:

“I love this job because, actually the first time I came here I recognized that most of them need so much love, they didn't get love from their parents and what and what. I must give them love and do something that will make them happy all the

time ja. I love this job because it gives me more experience that I didn't get before. I didn't work with people like this one, so I got so much of experience now. I can say, I always urhm, I feel happy but I always have that, when I see others, I don't like to see them crying and do whatever, showing that they don't get enough love from us ja. I always like to see them laughing and playing, but sometimes it happens that they get hurt or whatever ja”.

“The key concept in positive psychology is happiness” (Kristjansson, 2010, p. 300). Seligman (2004) found that there are three constituents of happiness namely pleasure (or positive emotion), engagement and meaning. Consequently in order for the participants to experience positive emotion they should experience happiness and in turn they will experience engagement as the results above suggest. The literature in this field has great support for the research findings in the current study. This will be illustrated below.

Positive organisational behaviour is the organisational aspect of positive psychology. Luthans (2002b) defined POB as “the study and application of positively oriented human resource strengths and psychological capacities that can be measured, developed, and effectively managed for performance improvement in today’s workplace” (p. 59). Thus, in line with Luthans (2002b) thinking it is important to note that a more positive approach is not only required in psychology but also in the world of work. This means then that “organizational members should consider cultivating positive emotions in themselves and

others, not just as end-states in themselves, but also as a means to achieving individual and organizational transformation and optimal functioning over time” (Fredrickson, 2001, p.164).

In a study conducted by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) it was found that engaged employees frequently experience positive emotions including emotions such as happiness, joy, and enthusiasm. Recent research has shown that engaged employees often experience positive emotions Bakker and Demerouti (2008), and this may be the reason why they are more productive. Happy people are more sensitive to opportunities at work, more outgoing and helpful to others, and more confident and optimistic (Cropanzano and Wright, 2001).

Research with Fredrickson’s (2001) broaden-and-build theory has shown that momentary experiences of positive emotions can build enduring psychological resources and trigger upward spirals toward emotional well-being. Positive emotions not only make people feel good at the moment, but also feel good in the future (Fredrickson and Joiner, 2002).

In a study conducted by Hakanen, Perhoniemi and Toppinen-Tanne (2008) using the broaden-and-build theory of positive emotions (Fredrickson, 2001) it was found that according to this theory, positive emotions broaden people’s momentary thought-action

repertoires and build their enduring personal resources. Feeling good sparks willingness to play, try things out, and experiment. This kind of initiative and creative activity fosters new ideas, novel solutions, and optimal functioning not just momentarily, but also in the long-term (Fredrickson, 2001). Thus, employees experiencing a positive state of emotional and motivational fulfilment at work, also termed work engagement, may over time acquire more initiative.

As the results in the previous theme suggest the nurses in this study take it upon themselves to cultivate positive emotions. They do this for themselves as well as for the patients. They believe that it is important for them to feel happy about their work as well as to be dedicated to their work. In so doing, they become engrossed and focused on their work and get a sense of fulfilment. They begin to have a love for their job as will be seen later in the discussion.

In a study by Engelbrecht (2006) participants were asked to describe a co-worker of theirs that is highly engaged. From the responses it was established that engaged midwives are people who “radiates energy and keeps up the spirit at the ward, especially in situations where work morale is low and frustration spreads. That is an engaged midwife is ready to do whatever needs to be done, and is seen as a source of inspiration for herself and others. She has a positive attitude towards her work and is happy for the things she is doing. The love (for her job) is expressed through the passion with which

she fulfils her daily tasks” (p. 154). The engaged midwife also goes the extra mile in that in addition to her normal tasks at work she does other voluntary work around the ward. The results from the current study suggest that the participants have a love for their job, therefore holding positive attitudes towards their work and are happy in engaging in this type of work.

Pertaining to positive emotions research conducted by Salanova&Schaufeli (2007) around engagement has concluded that employees who experience engagement often experience positive emotion and this may lead to the employee being more productive. When people are happy they tend to be sensitive to opportunities at work, more of an extrovert, considerate and helpful to others, as well as more confident and optimistic. This is relevant for the current study as the participants in the current study have indicated firstly that they experience positive emotion and secondly that they experience work engagement this in turn has an effect on how they treat the other staff members and how they view their work. These points will be elaborated on later in the discussion.

With reference to the ability to mobilize, an important reason why engaged employees are more productive and perform better than non-engaged employees may be due to the fact that they have the ability to create their own resources. Therefore what this essentially means is that if an employee is engaged they tend to experience positive emotions and when they experience these positive emotions they build up psychological

resources. Positive emotions not only make people feel good at the moment, but also feel good in the future (Fredrickson & Joiner, 2002).

In conclusion to this sub theme it may be noted firstly that positive emotions play a role in the individual experiencing work engagement but also of importance positive emotion plays a role in the resources that the participant has available to them. In this regard the job demands resources model comes into play. As stated earlier these points will be elaborated on later in the discussion under the relevant themes.

4.3.2 Negative emotion in the form of Stress

The second sub theme is *stress* which may be associated with negative emotion. Stress in this context is associated with the environment in which the nurses work. The participants in the current study do indicate that they experience stress due to the type of work they do and the environment in which they work in. However it is significant to note that this stress does not deter them. Of the eight interviewed participants six of the participants indicated they experienced stress in their work environment. The participants went on to say the following:

Participant one stated:

“Ya it is stressful because of the demands towards your work we are trying by all means to make the working situation pleasant because you know the staff are doing a stressful job so if you are going to add stress on them this will frustrate them. So it is a very demanding job because it needs you strength it needs your love it needs your patience it needs you dedication. It is not always easy to cope so as I said we do have workshops where we are encouraged and taught how to handle the difficult situations and when coming back we have to impart this knowledge to the staff and we also have people who motivate us. Because some may look at the job we do as degrading but someone has to take care of these children. And those people are us. But because we love our job and we are dedicated and engaged we overcome the stress”.

Similarly participant two said:

“It’s stressful because sometimes you know this child his mother doesn’t come and see him and how can they carry the child for 9 months and now can’t take of their child. Our mothers raise us as single parents but raise us. How can they dump the child? I feel bad. We are little staff. We have a lot of children to look after and a lot of work to do. So we have to keep an eye on them all the time. But I am happy to work here”.

Participant three went on to say:

“Yes it is stressful. You come home and you are drained mentally and physically and emotionally. You so tired. Working with these kids who don’t function normally makes it difficult and stressful as well”.

Participant four also indicated that she experiences stress and explains:

“Yes it is stressful. I know that yes it is. Sometimes I even get dizzy because the kid is screaming but I’m not feeling to run away”.

Participant seven elaborates and states:

“Yes it is stressful now these children is retarded like that if a person from outside can see how hard it is to work with these they will see it it hard. The children can’t walking and talking. And if they do something wrong we can’t hit them because they are like babies. We must only just punish them. They don’t know what she is doing. They can do what they want to do. Because she think it’s right but it’s not right”.

And lastly participant eight shares:

“Ja, it’s demanding and stressful....Urhm like these children are not the same, others they are so big, you can’t even hold him on the bath there, you have to ask

other people to help you, others they are always angry, you must try and if you have to bath him you have to ask the supervisor to come and be here because he can just kick you or do whatever”.

Freaney and Tiernan (2009) assert that nursing is an occupation that is inherently stressful. Nurses are confronted with suffering, death and grief on a daily basis, while, at the same time, performing certain tasks that could only be described as mundane. Consequently, nurses have long been associated and plagued with the experience of burnout. Additionally, given that nurses typically represent the largest percentage of employees at medical institutions their role in medical care is remarkably imperative and becoming more so in relation to the turbulent economy and shortage of nursing staff (Jenaro 2010). In their professional capacity, nurses provide care to patients. Due to the high physical and mental demands of their profession, they run a high risk of health symptoms and burnout (Tomic and Tomic, 2010). The job of a nurse is deemed to be quite stressful as it requires prolonged and odd work hours and irregular work shifts. Among other things, nurses experience a high level of physical load in dealing with seriously ill and dying patients. The physical workload, particularly handling and lifting patients, often requires close contact with people in need of medical and emotional support (Tomic&Tomic, 2010).

In a study conducted in South Africa by Van der Colff and Rothmann (2009) among registered nurses they highlighted the importance of the nursing profession. They stated that the nursing profession is of great importance especially in the South African context where health care is very expensive and there are a shortage of nurses due to nurses emigrating for better salaries and opportunities. The authors further went on to say that nursing is seen as a stressful and emotionally demanding profession which means that nurses are more susceptible to burnout. They state that the tasks that nurses perform at work are extremely demanding as they work with grief, suffering and death. Engaged employees view themselves as competent to deal with the demands that they face in their job. Therefore nurses who are engaged are energetic and have a sense of connection with their work activities.

From the above quotations and the supporting literature it can be concluded that the nursing profession is indeed stressful. Nurses work under immense pressure and this is highlighted by the participants in the current study. These nurses do not only have to deal with long hours, shift work and demanding patients but they also have to deal with the emotional stress that accompanies the job. The participants are working with patients who are mentally and physically handicapped. These patients cannot do anything for themselves. The nurses do everything. The nurses are care givers, friends, parents and support to these patients. This type of work is not just physically stressful but emotionally and psychologically as well. Yet despite all the stress that is encountered they remain engaged due to the love for their job and the happiness and help they bring to other

people's lives namely the patients. Thus it can be concluded that there is support for the findings of this study in the literature. The nursing profession is stressful and nurses do experience stress as a negative emotion.

4.4 Theme three: Job demands encountered

One of the pertinent themes that emerged during the research related to the fair share of demands placed on individuals in the nursing profession. These demands can affect the extent to which an employee is engaged in their work. Eight participants were interviewed and asked about whether they experienced demands in their work or home life that may have an effect on their work engagement. The participants identified three main demands that they encountered at work. These demands will be discussed in detail below as sub themes of job demands encountered.

Job demands in this regard can be described as either physical, psychosocial, social or organisational factors of a job “that require sustained physical and/or psychological (cognitive and emotional) effort or skills and are therefore associated with certain physiological and/or psychological costs” (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 312). High pressures at work, poor working conditions and emotionally demanding interactions with clients can all be characterised as job demands. Not all job demands are negative however when a job demand turns into a stressor in the pursuit of the demand then this

may be negative. The discussion will now focus on the following sub themes: insufficient salary, shortage of resources and working with children.

4.4.1 Insufficient salary

The first sub theme pertains to *insufficient salary* received by the nurses. Salary was one of the prominent themes among the participants interviewed. Most of the nurses in this study felt that they are not paid enough for the type of work they are doing. Many mentioned that nursing is both stressful and demanding however the income that they receive is not equivalent to the work they do. Of the eight participants interviewed seven of the participants indicated that pay was not in proportion to the work performed hence salary shortage was highlighted as a demand.

Participant one simply stated:

“Above all doing this job we are earning peanuts you see”.

Participant two explained:

“I like to work with them even if the company can pay... we earning so little but at the end of the day we dedicate or time, we not working for money. Salary is very low and my transport is very high. I have to support at home and at the end of the the money is not enough. ...not that much because I told myself it will be ok

it's not about the money. Even though I don't earn much I don't take it out on the child. I still enjoy coming to work".

Participant three then went on to say:

"The way we work is not the way we getting salary. We getting salary less than our jobs but even though we not getting paid a lot we still love our jobs and we saying the little bit we getting we must thank god. The manager always tries to out increase even though it's only R50. But even though it's demanding I still love my job. Electricity water and groceries are scarce as we are and NGO and rely on government grants and donations".

Participant four further explained:

"Sometimes like the money is not enough. I know we not working for money but we need money to survive".

Similarly participant six said:

"We are doing a hard job and few of the people can work like this. I think that the money we get is not enough. We do hard work but w don't get paid very much. But we are hoping they are going to make it better but for how long do we have to wait. That is my point".

Participant seven then stated:

“Maybe I can say that some of the other people that come here to work come only for the money not for the work. They have no love. Some of the people come to work but only because someone employed me. So what I am saying is our salary is not happy it is not enough for us. But I just accept it because I am a mother I can’t go anywhere else I can’t leave these children. Because I love them they got no mother. But you can see most of the time the staff come just for the money”.

And lastly participant eight revealed:

“Oh okay, ja let’s make an example, last month I only got nine hundred and fifty, ay, I asked them, they say a day is fifty something rand, ay I was so shocked when I get that money, because when I came here they told me about this one thousand two hundred, when I go to the office and ask them why I get this money, they say they count date until the twenty first because we get our salary on the twenty fifth, they say they count only the sixteen days I worked, they say because I’m also in the a probation, so I will get this money after three months then I can get this one hundred two hundred, ay but this salary because we do so much... low salary.....ja I try to put that thing aside, I don’t think of it every time ja, I told myself that I don’t look at what I’m going to get if I do this, what am I going to get after. I don’t ja I just do my job”

There is not a great deal of literature that deals specifically with salary as a demand on its own. Rather literature groups salary as a physical demand. When this physical demand is experienced by employees it leads to a lack of work engagement. Therefore the current study brings to the forefront and highlights low salary as an important factor to be considered with regards to work engagement.

In a study conducted by Rothmann (2003) in South Africa there was a focus on engagement and burnout. "Burnout implies a rather long temporal process since it is based on the fact that the person has been working for a while and is experiencing a chronic misfit between self and work" (Rothmann, 2003, p.20). Burnout may occur for a number of reasons one of which is working long hours and being under paid. Supplementing this work Maslach and Leiter (1997) formulated a model that centres on the degree of match or mismatch between the person and six domains of his or her job environment, one of these being a job demand which includes salary. The study went further to state that "insufficient reward involves a lack of appropriate rewards for the work people do. Both external rewards (e.g. salary and benefits) and internal rewards (pride in doing something of importance) could result in a mismatch" (Rothmann, 2003, p.20). Thus from the above it can be concluded that firstly a mismatch will occur if there is insufficient salary and secondly this will lead to negative consequences such as burnout as well as disengagement.

With regards to the Job demands resources model- one of the underlying psychological processes is the health impairment process. This process may be applied to this sub theme in that the participants in this study indicated previously that they do tend to leave work later than they are required and coupled with this insufficient salary this may lead to exhaustion in the employee which will ultimately have an effect on their work engagement. This health impairment process may also have an effect on the resources that are available to the employee (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007)

From the supporting literature and the quotes from the participants interviewed it can be concluded that insufficient salary is a serious demand that can result in negative consequences. It can have a negative effect on the employee's resources as well as their experiences of work engagement. However and more importantly the current study also finds that the participants indicated that whilst salary is a demand this does not hinder their experiences of work engagement. This does pose a problem in that many of the participants are breadwinners and have children to support. They do however feel engagement stemming from the love of their jobs. Thus the demand does not have an effect on either their resources or their experiences of work engagement.

4.4.2 Shortage of resources

The second sub theme that was highlighted was a *shortage of resources*. In this instance resources refer to physical resources in the work environment as well as human resources

in the form of a shortage of staff. This was not one of the most prominent themes however three of the participants indicated that shortage of resources did act as a hindrance in the work environment.

Participant two explained simply:

“We are little staff”.

Participant four said:

“Sometimes we short staffed you know ey its hard sometimes I am working and we are short of staff and there’s work to do but the work is not going. So we will do work in one thing but work in other things is not moving. So this means sometimes we have to leave what we doing and go and help on the other side”.

And lastly participant eight stated:

“Nappies, they wearing nappies, they don’t have this waterproofs, most of them they don’t have waterproofs and they got this, some of them they got this urhmkimbies but others they don’t have. If you can get these waterproof maybe it will be better”.

In a study conducted by Freaney and Tiernan (2009) it was found that increased pressure may be put on employees when their workload increases as a result of a shortage of staff. There is less staff to do the work and therefore there is more work that needs to be performed by the staff. “One of the most prominent barriers to engagement that arose was heavy workload” (Freaney & Tiernan, 2009. P. 1560). They go on to state that overload could be due to the area of nursing in which a nurse is working. Therefore if a nurse is working in the emergency room or in this case a home where they have to take care of mentally and physically challenged individuals, there will be more stress, pressure and demands on the nurse. Thus a shortage of nurses or staff will exacerbate the stress and pressure the nurses are already experiencing from the stressful job they are employed in. the nurses already have a considerable workload taking care of patients who cannot take care of themselves in any way, the shortage of staff increases this workload. Therefore this leads to negative emotions which may in turn lead to the work engagement of the individual being affected.

One of the participants did mention that another type of demand that the nurses face in the work environment is a shortage of resources and in this case a shortage of nappies that are needed for the patients. This is a serious problem as it makes the job of the nurse even more difficult and can be quite degrading as the nurses will have to clean up after the patient. In a study that supplements these findings by Bakker and Demerouti (2007) it was found that job strain which could lead to a lack of or interference in work engagement is as a result of a disturbance in equilibrium that exists between the demands

that an employee is exposed to and the resources that that employee has at his or her disposal.

Thus, this can also be linked to the job demands resources model as it is evident that there is a demand in the form of a lack of resources whether it is physical or human. This lack in resources is leading to a larger work load for the individuals that are employed which ultimately could be likened to the health impairment process mentioned previously. The larger work load will lead to exhaustion in the employee which will ultimately have an effect on their work engagement. Thus it is important to seriously consider the effects that demands have on employees.

The literature and the quotes correspond as there is a match in that the literature and the participants state that there are demands in the workplace. One of the major demands is that there is a shortage of staff and as a result of the shortage of staff there is work overload on the existing participants. The current study also found that another type of demand that was encountered but was not so prominent in this organisation is that of a shortage of resources. A shortage of resources is a demand as it will lead to the employee not performing their job to the best of their ability as they do not have the appropriate resources to do so. In this case this is a serious concern as a lack of resources will result in the patient suffering in the form of infections or sores on the skin. Thus in conclusion

demands in the form of shortage of resources are serious and the participants indicate that this will have a negative effect on them and how they perform their work.

4.4.3 Working with the patients

The third sub theme that was highlighted was the difficulty staff encounter when working with patients that are severely physically and mentally handicapped. Three of the eight participants encountered this demand at work and gave explanations.

Participant one stated that:

“This is the challenging job. So these children we are dealing with have not had parental love they never bond with their parents, we have found most of them dumped in the park or wherever so we are here to step in as their parents and give them the love that they never obtained so to do that we need to be dedicated to the work going the extra mile go beyond the call of duty. We encounter negative patients because as I said they don’t reason the way we reason. You find that sometime they have moods and attitude towards you. They can even get very vulgar swearing at you and you just have to swallow and on the other hand they get upset with you and you will find that they are not talking to you and there’s no reason. This type of attitude affects a person mentally. If you are matured you will know how to handle this situation”.

Similarly participant two explained:

“When working with people who have mental illness sometime they are fighting you can’t fight back you have to talk to them and calm them down. You must talk slow. Sometimes you feel bad with this child you feel you can do something with this child. It’s difficult working here. Like some of the children can’t even get to the toilet. I have to do everything. I have to clean up thoroughly. So for someone not from here to come and work here it would be difficult. If the kids do mess themselves they will be uncomfortable so I have to make them fresh. For me I have experience in other types of environments and before I didn’t think I could work with children like this but then I came here and I saw all different kinds of children, some who are mental and some who can’t even wake up from the bed. You have bath them and stretch them hands and legs but they must be fresh at the end of the day, they must look clean”.

And lastly participant eight explained:

“So that I try by all means to understand all these babies here and know what they need. Sometimes there are challenges. Let me say especially when we want them to go and bath in the morning, most of the boys don't want to bath. I must try by all means, because the other they can hit you. I mustn't hit them back; I must try and just do something that will take them out of what they are thinking at that time”.

This demand has not been researched extensively and therefore there is a lack in the literature in terms of this demand. Working with the patients is a demand on the nurses as the nurse's work with patients who are severely mentally and physically handicapped. This means that these patients cannot do anything for themselves. The nurses are entirely responsible for the patients. This is challenging as the nurses have to make sure each child is healthy comfortable and clean. This can prove to be a challenging task especially in light of previous finding with regard to shortage of staff. This is also a demand as the nurses will face emotional problems. The patients are not like other individuals. This may be heart breaking and emotionally difficult to deal with at first. Due to the handicap of these patients they may act out in ways that are difficult to deal with, they may get violent or they may be noisy or they may be completely unresponsive and stubborn all depending on their mood. This is difficult on the nurses as they have many patients to see to and they cannot keep track of every patient every moment of the day. Thus in conclusion it can be seen that this is a serious demand that nurses face but in the current study they have learnt to overcome it.

Thus in conclusion it can be noted that the participants do feel that they have demands in their environment. In this case the demands are in the form of insufficient salary for this type of work, a shortage of resources whether it be physical resources or human resources and working with patients who require constant supervision and who do tend to be quite difficult to handle. These demands impact on employees in that it may lead to job strain as stated by Bakker and Demerouti (2007). However the participants in this study are

opposition to most literature in that they do realise there are demands in the work environment and these demands do affect the way in which they perform their work however they do not allow these demands to deter them. They remain engaged to their work. They do not vent and take their frustration out on the patients and neither do they resent their jobs. In fact they enjoy their work and have a love for their jobs.

4.5 Theme Four: Resources Encountered

Job resources Schaufeli & Bakker, (2004) define job resources as “those physical, social, or organisational aspects of the job that may: (a) reduce job demands and the associated physiological and psychological costs; (b) be functional in achieving work goals; or (c) stimulate personal growth, learning, and development” (p. 296) “Hence, resources are not only necessary to deal with (high) job demands, but they also are important in their own right” (Bakker, 2009, p. 9).

Job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role or an extrinsic motivational role. On the one hand from the perspective of the intrinsic motivational role, job resources contribute to the employee’s growth, learning as well as development. Job resources have the function of fulfilling an individual’s basic human needs. These basic human needs consist of autonomy, relatedness and competence (Ryan & Frederick, 1997). On the other hand from the extrinsic motivational perspective job resources are instrumental in achieving work goals. When an employees work environment is highly

resourced this leads to employees feeling the willingness to dedicate one's efforts and abilities to the work task. When employees work in such environment they are more likely to successfully complete their task and achieve all work goals. Whether it is through the satisfaction of basic needs or through the achievement of work goals, the outcome is positive and engagement is likely to occur (Schaufeli & Bakker, 2004).

Therefore, job resources are the physical, psychological, social or organisational factors that contribute to achieving work goals, reduce the demands from the job as well as the physiological and psychological costs and lastly to contribute to stimulating personal growth, learning and development of the employee. It is important to note that resources are not only important in conjunction with demands but are important on their own as well. Resources lead to the achievement of or protection of other resources. Resources can be located at many different levels including "the level of the organisation at large (e.g. pay, career opportunities, job security), the interpersonal and social relations (e.g. supervisor and co-worker support, team climate), the organisation of work (e.g. role clarity participation in decision making), and at the level of the task (e.g. skill variety, task identity, task significance, autonomy, performance feedback)" (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007, p. 313).

There are four sub themes that make up this theme. These subthemes will be discussed in greater detail below.

4.5.1 Social support

The first subtheme that was identified can be named *social support from colleagues*. Six of the eight participants indicated that they encountered this resource in their work environment.

Participant one stated:

“The staff that we are working with is united, the staff never let you down. And we are here as a family and family to these children. We are there for them we love it”.

Participant four also encountered this resource and explained:

“The staffs are like my family too just like how I am with the children at home I am like that here. If I can see the thing I don’t like it I tell them. Because they come to work. We coming to help”.

Participant five went on to say:

“Our admin clerk, Ronelle is a very positive resource because when I came here as I said it was my first job so I had no idea what was going on from the time so Ronelle was like mother hen, there by me always showing me every time I used to get like I’m doing stuff wrong she can show me 100 times and never get angry”.

she'll show me like this is how you do it she'll sit by me until I finally get it right okay I finally conquered that then it's something else. She'll teach me again till I get it right".

Participant six also encountered this resource and explained:

"The members of staff support me. When I was in the hospital they phone me.....The staff also help me where they can so we all work together".

Participant seven similarly stated:

"Think with the other staff they support me. You know if I got a problem they are supporting me. Like in 2009 I was very very sick I was end up to go in a wheel chair. I couldn't walk my back was hurt. I stay three months at home. But they still pay me for the three months. my family and co workers they are encouraging me. If I can feel tired but if she is encouraging me it is wake me up. You see she make me up".

And lastly participant eight states:

"Ja I can say urhm the superiors are very good, ja they support us in everything. When I came here they told me that I must work hand in hand with them and if I don't understand anything I must go and ask them or I keep on doing that ja and

the people that I'm working with, sometimes you know in the place where there are so many woman, females (laughs) ja there's those, but, I try not to talk too much, I always keep quiet and do my work ja, but it's a nice place to work on ja".

Studies previously conducted concerning work engagement have found that job resources, for instance the social support employees receive from their colleagues and supervisors are positively related with work engagement (Bakker & Demerouti, 2007). Of importance from this study is the social support factor. If an individual has social support from either their colleagues or superiors this can be an important resource as it makes their work more enjoyable, a happier environment and they will feel that the work they are doing is of value. This will ultimately lead to the employee experiencing work engagement (Bakker and Demerouti, 2007).

A study conducted by Schaufeli and Bakker (2004) among Dutch employees working in various different companies found that there is a positive relationship between job resources and work engagement. The resources that are positively related to work engagement are performance feedback, social support, and supervisory coaching.

In a study that supplements these results conducted by Bakker, Demerouti and Verbeke (2004) they found that when employees are engaged they receive much better ratings

from their co-workers with regard to in-role and extra-role performance. This essentially means that engaged employees perform well with regard to work and are always willing to do that extra work to accomplish a positive result.

In another study which was conducted by Bakker and Demerouti (2008) which supplements the previous two studies it was found that employees whose jobs are characterised by task variety, autonomy, complexity, and supervisory support have highest levels of work engagement. Therefore people who are employed in jobs such as primary school teachers, artists, nurses, and managers experience the highest engagement levels, whereas printers, retail employees, and workers in the food processing industry experience the lowest levels of engagement. There is evidence for this in the current research study as the nurses in this study despite the demands they face still believe that they experience work engagement.

Thus, from the above literature it can be noted that there is support within the literature for the resource that was highlighted as important in the work environment for the nurses. It can be noted from the quotes that these resources lead to the employee experiencing work engagement. When the employee feels they have support from their co-workers they feel that their job becomes easier and they enjoy their work more. It is also important to note that if one employee is happy, engaged and supportive this mood and

attitude will be passed on to the other employees. In conclusion it can be stated that these social support does lead to the employee experiencing work engagement.

4.5.2 Family support

The second subtheme is *family support*. This theme was encountered by five of the participants. The quotes below capture the participant's feelings ad perceptions.

Participant one explains:

“Family wise I feel that they support me because some of us are breadwinners and if they discourage you and you leave work who will put food on the table at the end of the month. Families do encourage us and they appreciate”.

Participant three states:

“Yes in my house they understand even when I am working night shift. When I am going to work I am going to work they mustn't disturb. They know my work is demanding and I can't just stay away, they understand all this a. My family supports my work that I do”.

Participant four goes on to say:

“Because I am staying with my sisters daughter she’s 23 so she’s got baby. She’s got no mother no father and she’s staying with me I also got my brother and my other sister. I take my sister child like my child. She supports me. She’s with me. She also likes to come to work with me. She like to feed the kids and helping me to feed. So I know she love my work I am doing. I get family support from her”.

Participant six explains:

“My children also support me. When they are on holiday they want to come here and do the voluntary work”.

And lastly participant seven says:

“My family and my children and my husband don’t question me, why am I going to work. Sometimes I phone my son please come and fetch me I finish at five he came here and wait for me till half past five. He say mummy you don’t see the time. I say no I can’t leave the children I must sort out something I can’t leave the visitors. Because you know sometimes when I am leaving the visitors come. Now I can’t leave the visitors when they come. I must welcome the people. I must respect them. He can wait also he can come inside and help. If it’s feeding time he can come and feed. He knows mummy she love the job. Everybody at home understand ad they also love the work I am doing.my family and co workersthey are encouraging me. If I can feel tired but if she is encouraging me it

is wake me up. You see she make me up”.

“Work and family constitute the dominant life roles for most employed adults in contemporary society” (Montgomery, Peeters, Schaufeli & Den Ouden, 2002, p. 196). Greenhaus and Powell (2006) suggested that work-family enrichment best captured the mechanism of the positive work-family interface, and conceptualised work-family enrichment as “the extent to which experiences in one role improve the quality of life in the other role” (p. 73). Thus when looking at work engagement it is important to not only take into account the work factors but also the family or home factors as these have just as much of an effect on an individual’s work life. It is important to take into account an individual’s personal resources. Research has shown that employees also tend to be engaged outside of their working environment, therefore it’s important to take note of the relationship that exists between an individual’s personal characteristics and their work engagement as their personal characteristics may contribute to why they are engaged at work.

Personal resources as defined by successfully Hobfoll, Johnson, Ennis & Jackson (2003) are positive self-evaluations that are linked to resiliency and refer to individuals’ sense of their ability to control and impact upon their environment successfully. Personal resources may also come in the form of support that an individual receives from their family which is highlighted in the current study. In a study conducted by Hobfoll (2002)

it was found that personal resources are crucial for an individual's psychological well-being and more importantly for their work related well-being. This is what the current study is focusing on the well-being of the worker. If the wellbeing of the worker is compromised their work engagement is affected. "Personal resources seem to link job resources with engagement and in-turn performance" (Xanthopoulou et al, 2007, p. 185).

Similarly in a study conducted by Montgomery, Peeters, Schaufeli and Den Ouden (2003) it was found that support from work and family can reduce demanding aspects of a job. Thus if we use an example from the current study the participants are supported by their family in the work that they do to such an extent that their family do not mind if they work over time and even go to the participants work place and volunteer and help out. Thus when an individual has such support from their family this will lead to them experiencing work engagement as there is no interruption to the balance between work and family life but rather support on either side.

In conclusion it can be noted that the participants in this study do feel that there are resources that they encounter. These resources come in two forms firstly resources in the work environment in the form of support from co-workers and secondly resources in the home environment in the form of family support. A review of the literature displays support for the findings in this study. The review of the literature states that co-workers support is an important resource and when an individual receives support from co-

workers not only does this make their job easier but pleasant as well. This in turn will result in the worker experiencing work engagement as they will be more dedicated, absorbed and energetic about their work. Research has also found that when an individual is happy about their work this positive emotion can be passed on to co-workers therefore this may also be seen as a form of co-worker support. Family support is also an important factor to consider when thinking about work engagement. If an individual does not receive any support from their family with regard to their work this will make their work life difficult and unpleasant which will result in it affecting their work engagement. Therefore the participants in the current study indicate that the support their family gives leads to them loving their job and in doing so being more engaged.

On the one hand, this theme can be related back to the Job demands resources model in that the second process stated in the Job demands resources model is the motivational process. This process assumes that job resources have a motivational nature and can lead to high work engagement. The definition of job resources suggests that job resources may play either an intrinsic motivational role in that they help in fostering employees growth learning and development or they may play an extrinsic motivational role in that they are the catalyst in achieving work goals. Thus job resources can overcome the job demands as is the case in this study and can actually lead to the employees experiencing higher levels of work engagement which is the case with the participants in the current study.

On the other hand it is important to take into account an individual's personal resources and in this case the family support may be identified as a personal resource. Research has shown that employees also tend to be engaged outside of their working environment, therefore it's important to take note of the relationship that exists between an individual's personal characteristics and their work engagement as their personal characteristics may contribute to why they are engaged at work. From the results of this study it is indicated that the participant's family encouragement and support lead to them experiencing work engagement.

4.6 Theme five: Reasons for job continuance

Whilst doing research around work engagement the researcher came across literature that revolved around job continuance and work engagement. It is important to ask an employee the question of why do they remain in this particular type of work. More especially after the participant has indicated that their demands and challenges they face in the work environment and with regards to their work and well as due to the stressful nature of their job. When the researcher asked the participants this question two important subthemes emerged. These subthemes are a love for the job and a love for the children.

4.6.1 A love for the job

This subtheme deals with the emotion that the participants feel towards the work that they

are doing. Six of the eight participants indicated that they remained in their job because they loved their job. They went on to say:

Participant one stated:

“Love number one. Love overcomes everything. No matter how difficult or challenging the situation is but because you love your work. I love this job and I am dedicated not just any person can do this job. Many people that start here leave this job because they can’t cope. So without passion and love you cannot cope. I also like challenges in life because they strengthen my point because the more I experience challenges the more I have the techniques of how to go about the challenges”.

Participant two went on to say:

“I like this type of work. It’s difficult but I love it.I have experienced thing I never knew existed. I like this work even though it is harder work”.

Participant three said:

“I love my job and I enjoy my work”.

Participant four stated:

“I need to work, I need to help. Because what I am doing I am doing with my heart. I feel needed.I enjoy working here”

Participant seven indicated:

“I love my job I don't think I can be doing anything else”.

And lastly participant eight says:

“I love the work that I'm doing..... That I like my job and that I like what I am doing”.

This subtheme deals with the emotions that the individual experiences toward the work that they do. Work is one of the most important activities that we do in our lives and it takes most of our time. Studies conducted by industrial psychologists have shown that individuals spend almost one third of their lives at work. While some people may not really care about the work that they do and only see work as labour for others work ultimately becomes a part of their identity it is a part of who they are. Therefore they love their work and it is who they are. A passion for or a love for ones work will lead to positive outcomes in the form of work engagement (Vallerand and Houliort, 2003). The individuals in the current study indicated that they love the work that they do despite the

negative aspects that they may face. These individuals have a positive attitude towards their work and remain in this type of work because of the love they have for this type of work. In a study by conducted by Engelbrecht (2006) it was found that when an individual has a positive attitude towards their work and are happy about the things they have to do at work they have a love for their job and this is ultimately shown through the passion in which they fulfil their daily tasks at work.

Thus in conclusion this theme can also be related back to the Job demands resources model with regards to the motivational process. This process assumes that job resources have a motivational nature and can lead to high work engagement. This is in line with the motivational nature of passion as well. Harmonious passion refers to “a motivational force that leads the person to engage in the activity willingly and engenders a sense of volition and personal endorsement about pursuing the activity” (Vallerand and Houliort, 2003, p. 178). Thus the resources supplement the work that the participant engages in which in turn leads to a passion and an engagement and investment to the work.

4.6.2 A love for the patients

The second sub theme is a love for the children. Six of the eight participants indicated that this is one of the reasons why they remain in their work.

Participant four states:

“Because I love them and I like to helpI am doing what I can see they need. Some of them have no parents at all. So we are their parents they need our life. They need our thinking. They need our help. (Tears up) The other children they come here long time ago they got no aunty they got no mother they got no body. When I work here I am their mother. You are blanket for him making him warm. Because when they open their eyes in the morning they don’t see a mother they don’t know what is a father, shame they only know if you are coming with a spoon with food, they only know you are coming to take them to the bathroom to bath. That’s all she knows. . They haven’t got the other things you know.I love the kids”.

Participant seven states:

“Because even when I am off I am thinking , I am missing them too. most of the children here are orphans with no parents that’s why I like to be working here. I love the children because some have no mother that’s why I feel more important. I love them. Because they got no mothers. I feel I am a mother to these children so if I am here I am happy to work with them because I am a mother also to these children because they got no mothers.because I am feeling. The children got no parents. I feel I must be work here because most of the time the people got no love. Sometime people give away the baby even when it’s a normal child they got no love. me I was loving these children”.

And lastly participant eight said:

“Because urhm because I can say because I have this bond between me and these children .Some of them don’t have parents ja. It’s important for me to give them love that they didn’t get ja and make them feel at home. I can do, but I don’t know if I am doing the right things for them, they recognize that I’m doing the right things to them. I don’t know, but I am trying”.

The participants in this study indicated that one of the major reasons why they remained in this type of work despite the challenges and demands that they face and the highly stressful environment they work in is due to the emotional attachment they have forged with the children. The children have become an important part in their lives and they have become an important factor in the children’s lives. Many of the children see these nurses as their parents as they do not have parents of their own. And in the same token many of the nurses see these children as their own and love and care for them as such.

In a study conducted by Mackoff and Triolo (2008) it was found that nurses in that organisation remained in their work because they love working with the patients and therefore have a love for the patients. This study went further to state that theses nurses view their work as a calling. This indicates just how dedicated the nurses really are despite the stressful and demanding nature of their job.

This may be linked to the motivational process that is described in the Job demands

resources model. A love for the patients is a positive and motivational factor which ultimately leads to increased engagement by the employee

There is insufficient literature available on this sub theme. However from the current study it can be noted that this is an extremely important reason as to why the nurses remain in this type of work. The nurses become so attached and involved with the children that they love the children and therefore love the job which ultimately leads to work engagement and job continuance. It is important to note that despite how long an individual has worked in the particular organisation in the current study it does not determine that the individual is engaged or not. Therefore engagement occurs in this case when the individual develops and love for the patients and the job.

4.7 Theme six: Spirituality

Whilst conducting the research the researcher noticed that the participants often spoke of God. The participants also indicated that not everyone can do this type of work. It takes a special type of person and the person has to have a calling per say to do this type of work and work with these types of patients due to the demanding and stressful nature of their work. The participants also stressed that every morning before they begin their daily activities they gather all the patients and staff and say a morning prayer. Four of the eight participants particularly highlighted the importance God plays not only in their life but at

work as well and more specifically. The following quotes will give more detail to this theme:

Participant two and participant eight simply stated:

“The first thing in the morning and the most important thing is we pray

P:8 the first thing in the morning is we pray. To pray is so important”.

Participant four went on to say:

“I am happy because god challenged me to come and work here. I just put god forward. I am here because god told me to be here. I enjoy being here.....am here because god challenged me god believed I can do this work”.

Participant six explained as follows:

“First thing in the morning we do prayer. Thanks for the day and ask god to give us strength and this is very important to me. Because if I didn't do it there's something happen and then afterwards I realize I didn't pray in the morning..... some people they come here and see the place and the children and then run away because they haven't got that heart. I'm a touchable person. Even for myself the day I start here I didn't eat but when I came early in the morning I'm asking if I run away whose going to help them because they need help. What kind of person

will they get if I go away because I fail to do this job. Now in my heart I always tell myself I am the one. I am not even chosen by myself I am chosen by god now. ...Sometimes we have to pray and ask god for help”.

A review of the literature available surrounding spirituality, God and having a calling in relation to work engagement provided to be quite a challenge as there is a limited amount of research available on this topic. However the research and literature that is available indicates that God and having a calling are important aspects in understanding work engagement and how and why it is experienced.

Several lines of research in organisational behaviour and social psychology have dealt with having a calling and differently named, but closely related, constructs. One of these constructs is work engagement and its related concept flow. In this case work engagement and flow which examine human experiences on an episodic basis through focusing on people's subjective experience of a particular task or activity at a specific moment in time (Csikszentmihalyi, 1990; Kahn, 1990; May et al., 1999). Thus different studies view a calling differently. Some studies believe that having a calling is something that is religious and involves Christianity whilst other studies do not relate having a calling to religion however does acknowledge that having a calling is a partly religious occurrence.

In a study conducted by Dobrow (n.d) it was found that when people have a calling, they feel a sense of destiny about engaging in a particular type of work. Therefore if this is related back to the current study it may be stated that literature firstly does support the finding of this study. Secondly as was established earlier the individuals in this study do indicate that they experience work engagement and are therefore engaged to their work. This essentially means that according to literature and related to this theme the fact that the individuals feel that they have a calling to do this type of work leads to them being engaged in their work. This is the result as they are not doing the work for the sake of work or for the money as was also indicated earlier but because they have a higher purpose and in this case the purpose is a calling and God.

Literature and research conducted around having a calling highlights an important aspect that was also found in the current research project namely, a sense of passion or enjoyment for one's work. This theme is manifest through deep enjoyment and absorption in a specific task, in the case of work engagement and flow, whereas the other constructs examine enjoyment at a broader level (e.g., enjoying doing a type of work, being in a particular profession, etc.). Thus, the first component in the integrated view of having a calling is a sense of *passion*, or deep enjoyment and satisfaction from engaging in one's work.

From the results above as well as the brief review of the available literature it can be noted that having a calling or acknowledging the presence of God in work leads to individuals experiencing work engagement. The individuals in the current study believe that prayer is an important aspect of their daily lives and without it, it can be said that they feel lost. They also stated that God plays a big role in their lives and more importantly in their work lives. In stating this they also believed that they do this type of work because God called upon them to do it. Not everyone has the heart or the strength to work with these patients however through the love for their job, the patients as well as through prayer they are able to do this job, engaged and love the work they are doing. Despite the challenges they persevere.

4.8 Conclusion

In conclusion it can be seen that work engagement is an important aspect of any individual's life. Through work engagement emerges happiness, absorption, dedication, vigour as well as enjoyment. There are many factors that lead to work engagement and many factors that may affect the experiences of work engagement. These factors were discussed in this chapter. However the central thought that emanated from the participants in the current study is that despite the demands, challenges and stress they have a love for their job that cannot be tampered with. They are engaged to their work.

The next chapter will be focusing on a summary of the findings as well as the limitations that were encountered and recommendations for future research.

CHAPTER FIVE

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

5.1 Introduction

The current study explored nurse's experiences of work engagement. In doing so, the researcher identified what nurse's perceptions and experiences were surrounding engagement and more specifically work engagement in a highly demanding and stressful work environment. The researcher undertook the study through the use of the qualitative research method in the form of thematic content analysis. The results of the study suggest that nurses do experience work engagement even though there are extrinsic factors that threaten the extent to which they experience work engagement. The results also show that the positive emotions that the participants experience is as a result of enjoyment in the work they do the environment they work in and the people they work with. This despite some of the extrinsic factors such as low income and shortage of resources whether it be staff or materials needed to do the work effectively. Below the recommendations for future research as well as limitations to this current study is discussed.

5.2 Summary

The current research study was focused on investigating whether nurses experienced work engagement and if so, what were the factors responsible for experiences of work engagement. The study was also focused on the resources and demands that the nurses

experienced and the effect of these on work engagement. Further the study focused on whether these demands would have an effect on job continuance.

From the discussion presented above as well as the results of the current study it may be noted that there is not only one aspect that leads to work engagement but a multitude of aspects such as co-worker support, a love for the job, believing that their work is a calling as well as other resources. It can be further noted that the nursing profession is a stressful, demanding profession however regardless of these negative aspects the nurses that were interviewed maintained that they experienced work engagement.

The current study found the following:

The nurses that were a part of the current study firstly and significantly understood and reiterated that they do know what work engagement is and more importantly they do experience work engagement. The participants went on to explain work engagement in their own words as well as give a brief definition of their own of what they believe work engagement is. In so doing they captured the essence and the core of what work engagement entails' namely positive emotion such as happiness as well as dedication, vigour and absorption. These factors lead to an engaged individual who despite challenges and demands still experiences work engagement. The results that followed from this theme reiterated in the theme in that the rest of the results explained and illustrated why

the individuals were engaged as well as what were the demands that they were faced with.

The second theme that stood out and which is of importance is that of the dichotomising emotions that were experienced by the participants. It is important that this be noted as it is important to realise that work engagement does not just result out of happiness and positive emotion but that there is a degree of negative emotion but the participants can persevere through this and still be engaged. Thus the theme consisted of two subthemes positive emotion and a negative emotion namely stress. The participants identified that they do in fact experience positive emotion towards and in their work as they enjoy the type of work they do and they are engaged. This theme is related to the literature around positive psychology as well as happiness which has engagement as an important aspect. This theme therefore emphasised that the participants do indeed experience work engagement this is due to the positive emotion they feel about and towards their work.

The negative emotion that they participantsexperience is stress. This is not an unfounded emotion as it is evident that nursing is a stressful occupation and this is only exacerbated in the current study as the nurse's work with individuals that are so severely mentally and physically challenged that they cannot do anything for themselves and the nurses are their only form of hope. These patients have been abandoned by their families and left to fend for themselves which they evidently cannot do. The nurse steps in not only as a nurse in

this situation but as a mother, friend, caregiver as well as support. This puts a lot of pressure on the participants as this is a huge responsibility. The nurses in the current study do indicate that they find their work environment and the work they do to be stressful and demanding. However from the first theme discussed it can be seen that despite the stress they still enjoy their work and are engaged.

The third theme that was identified was the demands that the participants face in their work environment. The participants agreed that salary or in more detail a very low salary is one of the major demands they face. They acknowledge that they are not doing this type of work so they can be wealthy but at the same time many of the participants are breadwinners and have families to support so in this regard the low salary they receive is in essence a demand. The low salary is also seen as a demand as the participants feel that the work they doing is not equivalent to the amount they get paid. The nurses are performing an important job that not everyone can do and the fact that it is stressful and demanding should warrant a higher salary unfortunately this is not so. However despite low salary being a demand the participants go on to say they are not working for the money they do this type of work because of their love passion and calling for the job.

The other demand which was not as serious as salary is a shortage of resources that they encounter. The organisation the current study took place in is a non-profit organisation that relies on donations and government grants for operation. Therefore a shortage of

resources for example in the form of diapers poses as a demand and can make the job of the nurses more difficult than it should be. The other shortage of resources that is experienced is that of human resources. This is a demand as it means that the staff that is available are now overloaded with work and this leads to stress as they may not manage with the work that is given to them. However despite the demands that the participants pointed out they went on to say that although these demands are present they still experience work engagement and still enjoy their work. They do not allow the demands to affect their work or the way they view their work or treat the patients. The last demand that was identified by the participants was working with the patients. The patients the participants work with are severely handicapped and cannot do anything for themselves. This is emotionally as well as physically and psychologically draining on the nurses. They have to deal with sick patients as well as death, loss and illness on a daily basis. The fact they have a bond with their patients makes it even more difficult. Thus although the participants stated that they love the patients working with these types of patients can be daunting.

The fourth theme deals with the resources that the participants have. The participants indicated that the main resources they encounter are social support and family support. The social support that they were referring to is the support that they receive from their co-workers as well as from their superiors. From the results and discussion chapter it can be noted that the participants felt that firstly support from co-workers is of great importance and secondly they did in fact have the support of their co-workers. In fact

they support each other to such an extent that they feel as if they are family. The participants illustrated using examples how they received support from the co-workers and stated that this is one of the factors that lead to them experiencing work engagement. The participants went on to indicate that another important resource they encountered was support from their family. They believed that this is an important resources as their family supporting them makes it easier for them to do their jobs and happier as well as their family approves of their work. The family support they receive is to such a great extent that their family even volunteers at the home and helps where needed.

The fifth theme that was highlighted was the reasons for job continuance. Therefore since the participants do experience stress and demands why do they continue to do this type of work? The participants identified two main reasons their first was a love or a passion for the job. The participants indicated that despite all the negative aspects of their job they still have a passion and a love for the work that they do. They feel happy about their work and feel that they choose to do so because it brings meaning to their lives and provides them with a sense of making a difference in the world. The desire to find meaning through one's work is consistent with the philosophy of Victor Frankl. Frankl believed that the search for meaning is human's primary motivational force and that true meaning in life is found in the world rather than within oneself. The term "self-transcendence" describes this ability of human beings to find meaning in their lives by being directed toward something, or someone, other than themselves. It has been speculated that when the desire to find meaning is expressed in the nurses' practice, work engagement is

enhanced. The second subtheme is a love for the patients. The participants in the current study indicated that whilst doing their work they have become attached to the patients that they work with. Many of the patients are children who are abandoned and who do not have any family. The nurses feel that they essentially become the patient's family and parents. They have a special bond with the patients and enjoy working with them. They love the patients and go beyond the call of duty and this leads to them being engaged and staying in this work.

The last theme is one of the more interesting findings was that of the role of spirituality in work engagement. The results from the current study show that the participants place god and religion at the centre of their work. They firmly believe in prayer and that they are doing this type of work because they have a calling. They reiterated that they always begin their day with prayer and that God is such an important part of why they are doing this type of work. The participants believe that not everyone can do this type of work and that God chose them specifically. God chose them to teach them as well as so they can be there for the patients as the patients need them.

Studies have shown that nurses often report that their desire to find meaning in life led to a "calling" to the nursing profession. Nonetheless, the existential challenges that nurses and nursing students experience from their exposure to human suffering, illness, and death can lead to meaning and fulfilment or to emotional overload and burnout. (Palmer,

Griffin, Reed and Fitzpatrick, 2010). However in the current study burnout was not a factor. The nurses are fully engaged to their work.

The Job demands and the resources that the participants encountered played an important role in their experiences of work engagement as it led to the motivational process as opposed to the health impairment process for the participants in this study. The job resources coupled with the passion that the participants have for their job and the love they have for the patients result in a pleasant working situation which ultimately results in the participants experiencing work engagement.

Thus in conclusion it can be noted that engagement is an important factor to consider in the world of work and it can be affected easily by demands. However, if the individual has the necessary resources and passion for the job, experiencing work engagement will not be a problem.

5.3 Research questions answered

The research questions stated earlier in the project have been answered. This can be seen from the results and discussion section of the project. However a brief summary will be given below:

1. How do nurses perceive work engagement?

The participants that were interviewed stated firstly that they understood the definition that was given to and then went on to give explanations of what they believed work engagement is. They gave similar definitions to that stated in the literature review. The participants stated that they believed work engagement to be when a person is engaged and energetic and happy about the work. They stated work engagement is when an individual is happy about their work.

2. How do nurse's experience work engagement?

The participants explained their day to day activities and how this made them feel. The participants felt that they were happy with the work they did in the day as it added meaning in their lives and ultimately led to them experiencing work engagement. They explained their experiences by giving examples of certain incidents and explaining how these incidents made them feel.

3. What are the demands or resources that contribute to you experiencing work engagement?

The participants listed and explained a host of different demands and resources however only the common and important ones that were prominent were discussed in the results and discussion section. The demands that the participants experienced included insufficient salary, shortage of resources in the form of physical and human resources as

well as the patients with which they work. The patients the participants work with are physically and mentally challenged and this can be challenging for the participants. The resources that were prominent were social support in the form of support from the co-workers and supervisors and family support.

4. Why do nurses remain in this type of work?

There were two main reasons why the nurses remained. The first was that they love their jobs and have a passion for what they do. The second reason was that they have a love for the patients. The nurses become attached to the patients and feel as if the patients are their family and this makes it difficult if they want to leave their job.

5.4 Recommendations

The current study was conducted using participants working in a home for mentally and physically challenged individuals only; it would be useful to interview participants working in different health care settings in order to get their understanding of work engagement as different environments come with different experiences as well as stressors and resources. It would also be useful to extend the study in such a way to compare and contrast the different types of nurse's experiences of work engagement. It would also be useful to do separate studies for females and males so that their experiences of work engagement can be compared and contrasted. It may be useful to distinguish participants according their rank in an organisation and identify whether this

has an impact on the work engagement that they experience. The sample was taken from one of the several homes that are in the Durban area, it may be useful to do a broader study in which the different homes are included in the study as well.

5.5 Limitations

The sample size for the purposes of this study was very small a broader sample may yield better results. The participants being interviewed identified Zulu as their first language and the interviews were conducted in English therefore a language barrier may have been encountered. These limitations should be considered when conducting research surrounding this topic in the future.

5.6 Conclusion

Nursing is a demanding however it can be fulfilling occupation. It requires the nurse to go beyond the call of duty which is particularly true in the current study. Thus work engagement is an important construct to consider in the nursing occupation. Work engagement is enthusiasm with the actual work itself. Because the nurse-patient relationship is vital to the “work “of nursing, the ability of a nurse to self-transcend and derive positive meaning from patient-caring experiences is possible regardless of the relationship between the nurse and the organization in which he or she works. If there is work engagement there is passion, dedication, absorption, vigour and a general love for the job. Thus the current study has illustrated that it is possible to experience work

engagement despite demanding and stressful work environments and that resources play a vital role in the experience of work engagement. The current study has highlighted the importance firstly of the nursing profession as well as of work engagement and of resources. The current study has also brought to the forefront the importance of God and spirituality in work engagement as this is an under researched area. The result of the current study therefore is that the participant interviewed do in fact experience work engagement and have passion and love for their work that goes beyond and overcomes the challenges and demands.

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APPENDIX 1: Interview schedule

Section A: Biographical Data

1. What is your age?
2. What is your race?
3. What is your first language
4. What is your marital status?
5. How long have you worked in this position?

Section B: Interview questions

1. How do Nurses perceive work engagement?

- Literature defines work engagement as a positive, fulfilling, work-related state of mind that is characterized by vigor, dedication, and absorption
- What do you personally understand by this? The researcher could explain each characteristic individually and then ask the participant to say how they understand each characteristic
- How would you explain work engagement in your own words?
- From this explanation researcher may ask in what aspects of the participants life is engagement experienced and more importantly at work.

2 How do nurse's experience work engagement?

- How would you describe your day to day activities at work?
- Do you feel that these activities contribute to whether you experience engagement or not?
- Would you say your specific type of work contributes to you experiencing engagement?
- If yes in what way do you experience work engagement?
- If no do you think that there are specific things that can be done to bring about you experiencing engagement at work?

2 What are the demands or resources that contribute to your experiences of work engagement?

- Could you describe demands that you experience in your work environment?
- How do these demands make you feel?

- Do you feel that they contribute to your experiences of work engagement?
 - If so how?
 - Could do describe resources available either in your personal life or work environment?
 - How do these resources play a role in your life?
 - Do you feel that resources impact on your experiences of work engagement ?
 - If so in what way?
- 3 Why do nurses remain in this type of work?
- Many researchers have described nursing as highly stressful and demanding. Do you agree or disagree with this?
 - If agree how does it make you feel and why do you remain in this work?

APPENDIX 2: Informed consent

To whom it may concern

My name is Shaneen Frank. I am an Industrial Psychology Masters student at a local University. A part of my Masters degree requires me to do a research project. My research project will be focusing on nurse’s experiences of engagement in particular. My topic is: Exploring nurse’s experiences of engagement. A qualitative study.

I would very much appreciate it if you participated in my study as this would help me a great deal with my research. Your participation in this study will consist of you being interviewed by myself, the interview will be audio taped to help me accurately capture your insights in your own words and the interview will be approximately half an hour long.

Should you consent to participate in my study the following will be assured:

Confidentiality therefore the information and answers we obtain from you will only be seen by me and my research supervisor.

Anonymity therefore no identifying information will be used therefore we will not use your name or company’s name.

If at any time during the interview you feel uneasy you are more than welcome to leave. Your participation is completely voluntary.

If you have any questions, concerns or queries feel free to contact me on 072 721 2758 or email shaneenfrank@yahoo.com. You may also contact my research supervisor Neeran Ramjuthan on 078 1743602 or email ramjutn@telkomsa.net.

I consent to being interviewed and audio recorded by Shaneen Frank for the research project: Exploring nurse’s experiences of work engagement. A qualitative study.

Sign: Date:

If you have any queries about the rights of research respondents please contact Ms. Phumelele Ximba in the humanities and social science research ethics office.

APPENDIX 3: Letter requesting permission from the organisation for the study.

Dear Mrs. Wendy Mahraj

I am a student at the University of Kwazulu natal and I am currently completing my Masters in Industrial psychology. A requirement of completing my degree is that I have to complete a research project. The topic I have chosen to research is work engagement among nurses and I would greatly appreciate it if I could conduct interviews in your organisation. The interviews will be approximately 45 minutes long and the responses will be kept confidential. The participants will remain anonymous. Please let me know if I could have the permission to conduct the interviews at your organisation?

Kind regards

Shaneen Frank

APPENDIX 4: Letter granting permission from the organisation for the study

Dear Shaneen

I do not have a problem with you conducting the interviews at this organisation. Come in to see me and we can discuss the times when you can conduct the interviews and which staff members you would like to interview.

Regards

Wendy Mahraj

Cheshire Homes Manager

0824570948